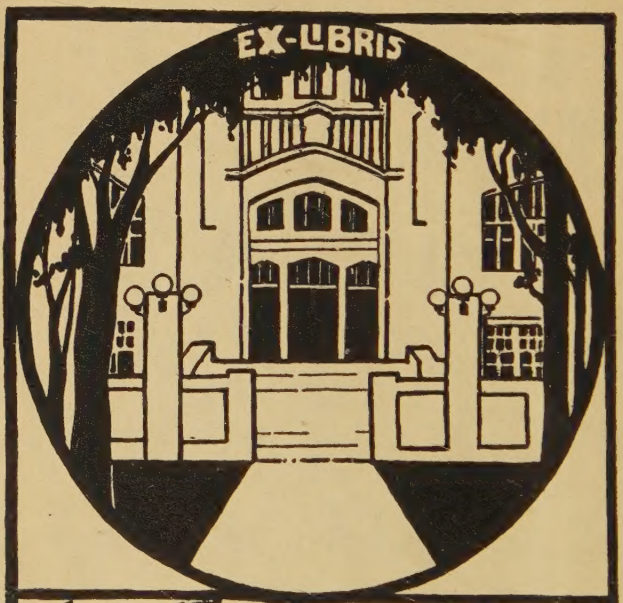

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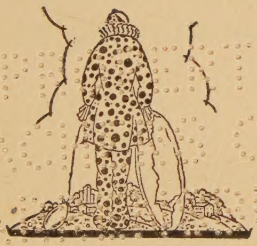
A Little Clown Lost

Barry Benefield



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To a Prince of Friends

DAVID H. JOSEPH

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A LITTLE CLOWN LOST

A LITTLE CLOWN LOST

·I·

Out of the Storm a Girl

LATE one afternoon in November he was in the kitchen cooking an early supper, having had no dinner, his solitary system calling for only two meals a day. A blue norther sweeping down the Mississippi Valley had suddenly transformed summer into winter in northern Louisiana, and was still blowing a gale, driving the dry leaves in ragged brown droves about the yards, whistling around the big house and roaring in the high pine trees.

Shep had stooped to shove another stick of wood into the stove. His two long-eared red hounds, lying near, leaped up and stood growling, the hair between their shoulders stiff and bristling. Still stooping, the boy turned his head to look at the door, and then his terrified eyes began searching the room for possible means of escape.

Leaning with her back against the door stood a

girl, her wide blue eyes as full of terror as his big-pupiled gray ones. The noises of the windstorm had hidden the sounds of her coming. "Mister, don't let them dogs bite me."

"Down, Blue!" shouted Shep, striking at the hounds with a stick of wood. "Dry up, Blood!" He rose and looked at her. Her hair was yellow like corn, much of it blown loose about her eyes, and she kept lifting her head and shaking it to throw back the hair out of her eyes. Her thin face was very white now, and she was biting her little white teeth into her lower lip, while she awaited the issue of her daring. Shep said nothing, but his posture was a continuing question.

"Mister, my pappy is out yander in our wagin sick with a misery in his side, so I wisht we could git a night's lodgin' here. We cain't go no further this night, we cain't for a fact. I been drivin', but hit'll soon be dark now, an' I'm afeared."

"Who is your father?"

"He's a yarb doctor, but his roots an' barks what he gives the niggers don't seem to do him no manner of good this time."

"What's his name, I mean?"

"Hooker Dibble, an' I'm Phoebe Dibble. Oh, mister, come on an' he'p me without no more talkin', because pappy shore is bad off." She held out her

hands to him, and Shep moved toward the small bareheaded figure. She flew out of the door, leading him to a covered wagon in front of the yard gate. Getting up on the hub of a forward wheel, she spoke back under the canvas.

"Pappy, here's somebody will he'p us. I 'low he'll he'p us, I mean, because he ain't said so yit."

"Phoebe gal, ax him to take the tail-piece outen the end of the waginbed so I can crawl out that way. I cain't git down over any front wheel now." The voice was sturdy enough, though the next moment it groaned dismally.

Shep unscrewed the two iron rods holding in the tail-piece, lifted out the broad board and stood waiting silently. The girl had gone in under the canvas and was helping her father toward this more comfortable exit. He put his arms around Shep's shoulders. "Now, young sir," he gasped, "you drag me out, but be gentle, for God's sake be gentle." The tall boy put his arms around him, eased him to the ground and assisted by the girl got him around to the kitchen and into a straight chair before the stove. Shep set out another straight chair for the girl, saying nothing and blushing as he pointed at it.

Lighting a candle, he began straightening up things, covertly taking stock of his guests. The stout, broad-shouldered old fellow wore his brown

and gray hair very long. A plait, its tip tied with a red string, depended in front of each ear, and his curled-up back hair fell to his shoulders. His eyebrows were thick jungles of brown and gray, and his enormous beard seemed to join with them and his hair to hide his face. His sharp eyes, his thin nose and a broad bit of forehead was all of his countenance that was visible.

Shep backed toward the door. "Now I'll go an' put the team in the stable an' feed them, an' then I'll finish supper. After that you can get in bed, Mr. Dibble. I'll have to fix a place for you. You all make yourselves comfortable."

"Young sir, I'll be obleeged if you'll fetch back that chist full of bottles an' tin boxes you'll find in the wagin. Them's my medicines, an' I feel like I shore do need 'em."

The hermit boy was surprised by his almost entire lack of fear of these two strangers. He thundered at himself in his mind for not having evidenced more cordiality by way of words. He was eager to help the sick old man, and he hurried through the chores outside with the team and then ran back to the house, bringing with him the medicine chest, setting it on the floor near the sufferer. Hooker Dibble selected a tall black bottle, took one deep draught of the liquid, smacked his lips and

then made a wry face as if to offset the smack.

"This is the only fire in the house now," Shep explained, "but I'll make up a blaze in a bedroom after supper. I've got a couple of rabbits stewin' on the stove there, an' when I've cooked some corn-bread and boiled some coffee we'll eat. Maybe you'll feel better then, Mr. Dibble."

"By gannies, young sir," old Hooker groaned, "I misdoubt it, but I'll do my durndest. We shore air obleeged to you for your hospitality. I'm dogged if I know what we'd 'a' done but for you, in that storm a-tearin' around out there."

"Oh, that's all right; you're welcome, I'm sure." This new rôle of host had been thrust upon him. At first he had been nervous and full of fear, but he was now doing somewhat better, he thought, and was immensely pleased with himself; for a moment only, and then, remembering the graciousness that had been his father's and his little grandmother's, he was again cast down.

Mixing some salt and coarsely ground meal in a big yellow bowl, he scalded it with hot water, put six tremendous pats of it in a greased pan, each pat showing the print of his fingers on their tops, and shoved it in the stove.

"This is goin' to be a paltry supper, Mr. Dibble, but I'll cook you a chicken for breakfast. You must

stay on, you know, until you feel entirely well. There's plenty of room. I live all alone here."

"What you air a-gittin' ready there, young sir, looks an' smells like a feast to us, don't it, Phoebe? Rabbit stew an' corn-pone an' hot coffee an' molasses, which I see on the table there! By gannies, hit sounds powerful good to me. An' hit's a God's mercy to be inside a house before a warm fire a night like this.

"Yes, sirree, that norther took us unbeknowst. We was makin', hell-bent for heaven, for a wagin-yard in Crebillon, though we 'lowed we had plenty of time. I been feelin' po'ly for two weeks now with a cold settled in my chist, an' we're on our way back home, up in the Ozark Mountings of Arkansas. But hit'll warm up in a day or so, an' we'll drive on. Hit looks to me like I'm gittin' old. I cain't stan' what I used to, an' my bitters an' pick-me-ups don't hit the spot no more."

He shook his head drearily, as if mourning not only his low state but the treacherous failure of his bitters and pick-me-ups.

"Git your spunk up, pap. You'll be all right tomorrow." Phoebe reached over and laid her hand affectionately on his shoulder, and he pulled it down and held it between his.

"Maybe I better ride to Crebillon for a town

doctor," suggested Shep eagerly. "Maybe a medicine man can't cure his own self." It occurred to him that it wouldn't be so dreadful to go into town after dark; and besides he was willing to dare a good deal for the old man. Sitting down by the sufferer, he glanced across at the face of the girl. She was biting her under lip, and he thought to himself, "Lordy, she's scared." He went on persuasively, "You just say the word, Mr. Dibble, an' I'll go like a shot; I could be back with the doctor by midnight."

"I'm obleeged to you, Mr. Tideboy—that's your name, ain't it? We been hearin' the niggers talkin' about you. No, sir, a town doctor 'ud give me a lot of chemical messes which God never meant for no man to put down in his insides. My roots an' yarbs can do me more good; if *they* cain't raise me, I'm a goner. But there now, young sir, an' you too, Phoebe gal, don't you all git skeered. This'll pass; I've had it afore."

After supper, of which old Hooker ate mightily, explaining that it had been a long time since he'd had a game stew, Shep started a roaring blaze in the fireplace of the bedroom just across the back porch from the ell, in which was a washroom, the kitchen, pantry, and the large dining-room. The vast bedroom with ceiling sixteen feet high had been first his

mother's and then his grandmother's. Phoebe came in to help him. Opening windows, they swept and brushed and rubbed, and put sheets and blankets on the huge canopied four-poster bed.

"You're the funniest boy—man, I mean—I ever seed." Phoebe stood scrutinizing him admiringly, her hands on her hips, her high cheek-bones touched with a deeper color than the rest of her fair face. "Seems like you can do *everything*—cook, sweep, make up beds an' I don't know what all else."

He felt a hot blush on his face and neck, and turning quickly he kicked a log back on the fire with his bare foot. He became suddenly conscious of his feet. He wished he had on his shoes, but they were up in the attic, and besides he hated to wear them. Nevertheless he resolved to put them on in the morning, nearly a month ahead of his usual time for covering his feet. *She* had on shoes, brass-toed brogans the tops of which stood away from her thin pipe-stem legs, making them seem even thinner than they were.

His back was now to her; he wanted to face around and look a long time at her, gathering clearer details than he had. He remembered her thick, drab-brown, pin-checked cotton dress, the tense eager little face, the yellow hair twisted into

a great flat knob at the back of her head. He longed to know other things about her, but shyness kept him staring at the fire.

"How old are *you,* Phoebe?" He spoke over his shoulder.

"Seventeen, goin' on eighteen. How old are you, Mr. Tideboy?"

"I'm nineteen. People mostly call me Shep. Well, let's bring in Mr. Dibble. Maybe he'd like to go to bed right away."

Old Hooker said he was more than willing to crawl into bed. "Lemme curl up like a animal, an' I'll come around all right." He had now, he declared, a pressing pain in the umbilical region, his heart was fluttery, the left side of his chest hurt, and he was dizzy. He took another long draught, from a tall blue bottle this time, hobbled into the bedroom and dropped down on the four-poster.

Shep waited on the hearth in case he should be needed to help undress the patient. Phoebe took off the old man's shoes, his coat, two vests and his shirt, and then the sufferer, groaning at the exertion, shoved his legs under the blankets, whereupon the girl put her hands beneath the covers and drew them out holding his trousers in her hands.

"Phoebe gal, I want you to sleep in here on a

pallet before the fire. I might need you in the night." Old Hooker caught her hand and kissed it, and she turned her head lest he see her eyes. "There, there, Phoebe, I feel you tremblin' like you had a ague; don't be skeered about me, child. Shucks, I ain't a-goin' this time. But sometime, Phoebe, I'll pass in my checks. Maybe in a great hurry—maybe in a accident—so as I cain't have time to say a word to you. If I ever do you go on up in Arkansas an' live with your Aunt Nannie; she'll give you a home an' be glad to do it. You'd be worth that an' a whole lot more to her. An', Phoebe, save my black notebook with my remedies writ in it; hit might be right he'pful to you some day.

"Aye, Lordy, lissen at that wind a-howlin' out there like hounds on a trail. Howl on, hounds, you ain't a-goin' to git me this night, I'll be bound. Phoebe gal, you ain't had such a terrible hard time, have you, a-traipsin' around the country with your trampin' ole pappy, since your mommie died? I could 'a' stayed up yander an' scratched them hills, an' you could 'a' gone to that prissy school-teacher three or four months in the year; but I 'low you've learnt as much on the road with me. Maybe not the *same* things, gal, but things jist as good as her book teachin', an', by gannies, better too.

"You've met new people every day, Phoebe, an'

seed many a sight you'd never laid eyes on up yander in the mountings.

"Do you remember, Phoebe, that week we was storm-bound in the wagin-yard at Natitoches, along with that medicine show? I didn't take much stock in that perfesser's remedies, which was fotch-on stuff from St. Louis, but them two little red-headed banjo-pickin' gals of his were fair cautions, they shore was. What a time you all had in the waginers' house, frolicin' together an' actin' an' talkin' an' swishin' your skirts like grown-up women with your dolls; an' the perfesser an' me gabbin' away about our travels on the road. On the road, Phoebe, on the road; the jingle of the harness, the siftin' of the sand from the wagin tires, camp-fires, the wind in the pines—oh, Phoebe gal, I ain't nothing but a vagabondin' ole fool an' I 'spect I done put my restlessness in your blood too.

"But you ain't so ignerant of book teachin', air you, Phoebe? You got through all them McGuffey readers, an' you ought to recite that piece for Mr. Tideboy about the ship an' the storm an' the Inchcape Rock."

"To-morrow, pappy, maybe."

"Well, all right. To-morrow'll be better, child. I'll be on the mend then, an' I can enjoy it more. I've heared you recite it a thousand times, I reckin,

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but hit never is old an' stale for me from you. Now make your pallet down an' we'll tell the young sir good night."

She dropped on her knees by the bed and began kissing old Hooker's gnarled hand.

"Why, Phoebe gal! What in the *kingdom* is the matter? I ain't said a thing to skeer you."

"No, sir, but the *way* you said it!"

The tall barefooted boy stole across the room, opened the door, eased himself out and closed it without a sound. In order to be within call he did not go to his accustomed sleeping place in the attic but stayed in the kitchen. He rattled the stove to let the girl know where he was. He blew out the candle, wrapped himself in a blanket, lay down across two chairs pushed together, and closed his eyes.

Usually sleep was thus easy for him—to lie down and close his eyes. But to-night sleep was not near him, and presently he opened his eyes again. He could see, through the shadeless kitchen window, in the pale nervous moonlight that often darkened with swiftly traveling shadows from masses of gray clouds stampeding across the sky, a high pine tree writhing in the wind, its limbs beating up and down like arms in distress.

Vaguely but profoundly dissatisfied with himself, and dimly surprised at the unusual emotion, Shep

yielded to an impulse to compare himself with his tall father, who now seemed a prodigious figure to him.

When that Samuel Shepherd Tideboy, himself little more than a boy at the time, had ridden down out of the mountains of Tennessee, northern Louisiana was no more settled than the turbulent Texas territory just west of it, and Crebillon was, by virtue of its steamboat connection with far-away New Orleans, functioning as the metropolis of a domain as large as many a European nation; and the Civil War was some ten years in the future.

Land was to be had for the taking, and that other long-legged, tow-haired Tideboy, having come from the hills, chose his acreage out to the north and west of Crebillon, though the lower flatter ground to the south and east was richer, less densely grown with trees and therefore easier to make ready for cultivation, and so more thickly populated with white neighbors.

Young Tideboy had started with a one-room log house. He worked hard, prospered, married a rich Dessaix, and soon an architect came up from New Orleans to plan another of those white mansions for a small feudal lord in the green wilderness. Labor and material were boundless. The mill that supplied lumber was twenty miles away, but there were teams

and drivers in plenty. The lumber came from the mill without a knot or flaw, and though it was rough and unplaned there were numberless slaves to plane each board and stick by hand.

Time also seemed inexhaustible in the warm unhurried settlement, and the utmost care was given to each joint and peg and nail. Of all cypress in its parts exposed to the weather, of all heart pine and oak within, put together with an integrity that knew no temptation of haste, the big house, as everybody on the plantation called it, long outlived the system and the period that gave it birth, as has many another "big house" in the old slave lands of the South and Southwest.

After the Civil War the Tideboy plantation of some five thousand acres began shrinking. Ambitious freed blacks and small independent farmers of a new day bought outlying portions of it, and when Samuel Shepherd Tideboy died, in the eighteen-eighties, there were only five hundred acres still belonging to the big house, chiefly cultivated by negro families working on shares who could move on when they wished.

After he went to the family graveyard out on the knoll in the fields, surrounded by a white picket fence and marked by a rectangle of tall dark cedars, all the tenants except two did move on. There

were now in the big house only a very young Shep Tideboy, born when his father was more than middle-aged and killing his mother in being born, and his hawk-nosed little grandmother. Southern negroes, although then free, were often more content and comfortable when they were bossed considerably by a white man, and when they were in alliance with a well-to-do planter. The big house now seeming weak to the Tideboy tenants, most of them deserted it.

Shep's Granny Jeanne ruled with a rigid discipline the two remaining black families, both of whom had stayed because their women folks enjoyed certain advantageous pickings there about the big home. She applied rigid discipline also to young Shep. In her end of the parish there were not more than half a dozen white families, widely scattered. The new white people had gone south and east of town, following the old trend of their kind, and the northwestern end was still a sparse settlement almost entirely of negroes. There being then no school nearer than Crebillon, ten miles away, the boy's dark, black-eyed little grandmother had taught him herself, and continued the teaching so long as she lived. When he was seventeen she passed on to the plot of ground marked by the rectangle of tall silent cedars.

By will and proper court orders the Tideboy affairs, now no longer of large importance and becoming less so year by year, had fallen into the hands of a certain Cesar Honfleur, a young realtor of Crebillon, designated guardian of Shep and executor of the estate. Every autumn just before school began in Crebillon the solicitous Mr. Honfleur rode out to the old place, fruitlessly questioned the two negro tenants as to the boy's whereabouts, and galloped furiously back to town.

Shep was at the hunting and fishing age, he had relapsed with profound content into primeval wildness, and his energetic and well-meaning guardian and cousin was entirely helpless to control him. Nothing short of a posse with bloodhounds could have captured and dragged the hermit boy into school and civilized respectability.

The two negro families, having wide choice of tenant-houses and plots of farming ground after the death of old Mrs. Dessaix, had moved to the back of the place and rarely went near the big house. There was talk generally among the negroes of its being haunted, and they liked to think and act as if it were, for the sake of the thrills. Shep used it as a sort of headquarters, or point of departure; and even when there he occupied only the attic, because it seemed a peculiarly secret place and because

in wet weather he could listen to the rain pattering on the cypress shingles just above his head.

A horse as wild as he was roamed the fields, these surrounded by gray oak fences promising a century of service, almost supporting himself, and was available when, on rare occasions, Shep worked small patches of corn and sweet potatoes, or slipped in to a store on the edge of Crebillon to swap furs and chickens and eggs for tobacco, shot-gun shells and a few groceries. He might have had money from Cesar Honfleur, the estate being far from bankrupt, but he feared meeting that fiery young cousin preaching respectable virtues and ambitious strivings.

The shaded big house, its white paint long gone gray but not peeling off, seemed beyond the reach of dissolution. The pink roses and the blue sprigs of tiny flowers faded on the wall-paper inside, layer after layer of musty-smelling dust settled on floors and furniture, so that a bug crawling across a room left a long and perfect trail of small indentations that remained until blotted out by other layers of dust; but the old house sat as lightly and as serenely upon its high red-brick pillars as it had when the French architect handed it over to the elder Tideboy.

Little pads of green moss growing between the red bricks of the walks in the front and back yards

pushed up above the level of the bricks, for there were few human steps to keep them pressed down. The two magnolia trees in the front yard, the tall pines at the eastern and western ends of the picket fence, the walnuts and the oaks marched on upward toward the sun, healthy and shapely without care; but the rose bushes, the Cape jasmines, the pomegranates and other smaller growths were, with the high grass, a riotous jungle of lush vegetation. Doves cooed in the pines of the front yard and sometimes Shep would startle a covey of quail in the grass there.

The green blinds of the old house were always shut, the double front doors of black walnut never opened. The tall boy cooked in the woods or over a fire in the back yard, going into the kitchen of the ell behind the rear porch only when the weather was especially severe. If people rang the door-bell at night he remained quiet in the attic; if he heard them approaching the house in the daytime when he was about he fled to the fields, calling his two red hounds after him.

Always before this Shep had escaped guests. Those two now in his mother's bedroom had been inescapable. But he was not sorry. Thinking of the sick old man and the frightened girl, coming in out of the wind and the cold, he was glad he had been

able to help them, and wished that he could do more for them and, especially, that he could do it gracefully, as his father and his grandmother would have done it. When daylight came, if it ever would come, he meant to insist that he go to town for a doctor. Perhaps he ought to ask his Aunt Lydia to ride out in a livery stable buggy. Yes, he would go and say nothing about it beforehand except to the girl.

The fire was dying, and he heard the joints and cracks of the ancient stove settle and creak with the coming of coldness to it. One of the hounds lying behind the woodbox moaned in his sleep, scratching the floor with a jerking foot, living over again a chase that was part of a day passed on. By midnight the wind was losing its strength, and well before dawn it was dead. Then at last Shep drifted off to sleep, still worried about the old man of the road and his eager-faced daughter with the great blue eyes that darkened so beneath her tears.

When he awoke, with a start, the kitchen was gray but growing brighter with each moment. Brushing sleep from his eyes with the back of his hand, he gathered pine kindling and oak billets in his left arm and crept to the room of the guests. He had warned Phoebe to stay covered up and warm until he made the morning fire.

Opening the door cautiously, he peeped in. She

lay on a pallet before the fireplace, now filled with gray ashes, from the middle of which a small red eye of live coal glared at him. Her lips were parted, her left hand lay across her breast, rising and falling with her steady breathing. Old Hooker's eyes were wide open. Chills ran down the boy's back at the sight of them, and he turned to run; but, bracing himself, he edged inside the door, closing it softly.

He tiptoed to the hearth, raked away the cold ashes from the living heart of fire, laid on some small splinters of fat pine. They exuded pungent drops of turpentine, fizzed in tiny blue violence for a moment, then flamed up. Carefully he put on a larger piece of kindling. Kneeling on the hearth, he turned to look toward the sleeping girl to see if he should continue his slow caution against waking her.

Her eyelids lifted slowly, and she smiled; and then she called, "Pappy, pappy, wake up! Hit's a new day, an' you'll be better now. Wake up, pappy; the storm's gone, an' I hear birds singin'. We'll be on the road again soon. Wake up, pappy, an' say good mornin'." Her voice was gay with banter.

The tortured boy suddenly dumped the oak billets on the blazing pineknots, and holding his face away from her rushed out of the room.

· II ·

Dark Shadows in Arcady

Old Hooker had gone out with the storm of Tuesday night, and on Thursday his covered wagon moved slowly across the field toward the rectangle of tall dark cedars, Shep walking by one of the horses and holding the bridle rein, Phoebe crouched on the high spring-seat under the front of the canvas, three negro men, two women, and a group of seven children following on behind.

Social responsibility had fallen suddenly upon the hermit boy; he had done his best, but he was grieved with himself that his best here made so poor a showing. He had hurried Pompey Nix, one of the negro tenants, to Crebillon on Wednesday to get a coffin. The stolid black man, called Loretta's Pomp, always overawed in town, had executed the commission, explaining nothing to the uninterested people of Crebillon or to the few he met on the road.

On that day Shep had ridden six miles up the country to engage for the funeral services the old preacher who had been present when his father and

grandmother died; but the aged Methodist was off on his circuit, and since the weather had turned as quickly warm as before it had turned cold the boy had called in the pastor of a near-by negro Baptist church. He had feared that the body might "mortify," as the black people said, if he delayed the burying a day by going to town Thursday in search of a white preacher there.

And yet Pompey Nix, Loretta, and their three children, wry-necked little Seneca Samson, his portly Ariadne, and their four small Samsons, and the Reverend Job Whaley lacked nothing in solemnity, dignity, or tearful respect. Loretta and Airy wept as they walked, the children in their Sunday clothes rolled their eyes and were very quiet, and Job, with his long black Prince Albert coat buttoned all the way down, marched as to a noble dirge. Seneca and Pompey had dug the grave in the morning, and had rushed home to don their best suits for the funeral.

Perhaps old Hooker would not have been displeased if he could have seen the mourners moving across the brown field in the white afternoon, for such as these had been his chief customers and his most loyal defenders. But Shep's head hung low as he stumbled on.

At the cedars he and the three men lifted out the

shiny gaudy coffin of Pomp's selection, bore it inside the picket fence and laid it on two crosspieces above the grave. Job read the words about resurrection, meaning as much and probably indicating as much as most men could, and bowed his gray head for a moment; then handing his Bible to Loretta, he took one end of a rope and helped lower the coffin into the boxed-in grave.

Shep's shyness overcome by emotion, he seized Phoebe's hand when Seneca and Pompey began shoveling the clods in on the coffin covering. He knew she would want the sense of support when that hollow scrabbling sound came up to her. She leaned her head sidewise against his shoulder, gave a deep quivering sigh and surrendered to the exquisite relief of womanly tears.

And so they stood until the grave was filled in, mounded over, and patted smooth, the tall boy agonizing for the want of something comforting to say to her who looked so little and seemed so appealing standing against him. No words came to him to speak, but he felt as strong as a lion and wished that somehow he might use his strength for her.

"Mr. Shep," asked Seneca, "does you all need us any more?"

"No, thank you. We'll drive on to the big house

now. I'm goin' to make it up to you all for this sometime."

The negroes filed out of the small gate, closing it with laborious gentleness, and after a while the boy and girl mounted the wagon and rode on back to the big house, silently and thinking only of the old man of the road dumb and still in a brown hole in the earth, boxed in and weighted down.

Though the clear days were once again summer, the nights told of winter coming, and after supper Shep went into the big living-room to make a fire. The room, opening its French windows on the long front porch, connected through a door with the bedroom in which Hooker Dibble had turned off into a new road.

Shep had left Phoebe crouched in a chair before the kitchen stove, staring with great dry eyes that frightened him; but hearing him in the front room, which had not before been opened, she seized a broom and a pan of water and hurried in to help, knowing it would be deep in dust. They drove most of the dampened dust into the fire and much into the air, and then left the room with windows wide. The draught up the heated chimney and the wind of the chill dusk would presently brush clear the air.

"It's for you," he said, sitting down by the kitchen stove to await the purging by fire and wind. "I

thought maybe you wouldn't want to sleep in the other one, now."

"Oh, Shep, the trouble we've been to you!"

"Shucks, Phoebe!" He thought unutterably tender things he wanted to say to her, for her eyes were wet and dark again, and splendid shining things he longed to do for her. He reached over and took her hand in both of his, holding it as a great-hearted boy holds a lost and stricken baby bird. After a while he began talking, keeping his eyes away from hers.

"Phoebe, when you want to go to that aunt your father spoke about I'll help you. I reckon we'll have to write first."

"Shep, I don't *want* to go to her. I *hate* her."

"But—"

"Couldn't I stay around here somewhere near? I aim to work. I knowed all along that sometime pap would drap off an' then I'd have to do for myself."

"There isn't any white family near-by in this neighborhood, Phoebe, an' the few that are in this end of the parish wouldn't need you. They've daughters of their own, an' besides niggers do all the work they have done by outsiders. I could sell off your father's wagon an' team an' things, an' send you the money."

"Well, I reckin maybe I'll have to go to Aunt Nannie, but let's not talk about hit any more to-

night. My head's all fuzzy inside, an' I cain't think. Let me go to bed, please; I'm mortal tired, Shep."

In the living-room he pulled the huge, old-fashioned horsehair sofa in front of the fire, supplied her with fresh blankets, closed all the windows but one, built up the fire, and waited at the door leading into the next room, looking back at her standing on the hearth leaning her head against the mantel.

"Now you stay tucked-up snug in your covers, Phoebe, in the mornin'. It'll be cold till after sun-up. I'll come in an' start a blaze, an' when the room's nice an' warm you can get up. I'll have breakfast ready."

"I'm a-goin' to git up an' he'p you cook breakfast, Shep. I'm a shame an' a disgrace, an' that's a fact."

"No, no, Phoebe, you mustn't. You are my *guest.* Don't you see? An' besides I *like* to do things for you."

"Oh, *do* you, Shep? I'm like that, too, about you. I been jist crazy to do things for you, only I never seed much I *could* do. It made me feel so ornery an' no account."

"Well, good night, Phoebe!" His voice was gentle, and he dropped his eyes.

"Good night, Shep!" She bit her lower lip under

her small white teeth, her face tense and drawn, the outer corners of her eyes and her mouth tightened with emotional strain.

The next day he shrank from the unpleasant subject of her going away. She let him build her fire and cook the breakfast, but after that she took charge of household affairs. He pottered about outside most of the morning, splitting kindling and cutting wood, grinding corn-meal in a hand-mill down at the stable, killing a half-wild descendant of the Tideboy poultry flock for dinner. In the afternoon, locking up the house, they went out across the fields in the sun.

Frost had touched the persimmons, and they were dimly golden globes of granular sweetness all streaked with silver at their tops. There were still chinquapins, miniature chestnuts, peeping, black-eyed and provocative, from their prickly brown burrs; and delicious beyond words to young appetites whetted by walking and running in the open air. Autumn field larks and coveys of quail rose with thrilling whirring suddenness from the grass, so that often Phoebe seized his arm in tiny feigned fright, smiling up at him a moment later to show she wasn't *very* scared after all.

This out here was the hermit boy's kingdom—the fields, the branch with the brown pebbly bottom

that streamed in a wavy line between a double row of trees all across the Tideboy place, the big woods down beyond the plantation, by Abancourt Bayou, extending for miles; every dim path, every fallen tree that gave a lucky crossing of the bayou, every deep place in the water that was good for white perch, every shallow rapid that was good for striped trout, all the silent brooding sloughs where grass grew tall and wild ducks came when ice was in the North, every piney hillside where red fox-squirrel ran—this was his kingdom, and here at any rate he was assured, masterful, radiant. It had been for him a solitary kingdom, now he had a consort.

Breathless and of few words, they fared on through the woods, their eyes wide open, holding hands and swinging them up and down when the way was broad enough for two abreast. The old man of the road, hidden by their happiness, was forgotten from time to time, and they raised their voices and shouted in sheer ecstasy, falling silent and shamefaced when they remembered him again. They did not try to explain why their voices lifted in wordless song, for they couldn't have said why it was; nor why they dropped to sudden silence, though they knew well why that was; for now in these high precious moments their thoughts ran side by side and slow speech was unnecessary.

He showed her where otters slid down a gray clay bank into the bayou. He had never seen them, but he was certain of his theory. That slick path proved it, didn't it, Phœbe? "Oh, yes, Shep," she whispered, "I know you're right."

In a dusky cove a school of minnows flipped their shining silver sides above the water. "An old trout is after them," he explained. "Make a noise an' skeer him away," she pleaded.

They sat on a log and listened for what they could hear. That was a woodcock calling away over in the woods, he informed her, proud of his knowledge and eager to lay all before her; and that bird nearer was a yellow-hammer, and that impudent little barking close by was a red fox-squirrel, which soon he pointed out to her in a cypress tree standing with its feet in the water. Child of the country road, she knew all this, but she pretended that to her it was knowledge strangely fresh and entirely wonderful.

Late in the afternoon they lay on a hillside and watched a great white continent, many separate islands and vast archipelagoes drifting across a sea not nearly so blue as her eyes, and buzzards circling and circling upward until they were small black specks that soon, it seemed, must fade invisible into the sky. The sun slid down behind the pines, the air chilled, here and there single brown leaves

wrenched themselves loose from parent limbs and sailed around and around easing themselves to the waiting ground.

And the king and queen rose and paraded back toward home, transformed somewhere between the branch and the big house into a tall, gray-eyed, tow-haired boy wearing a ragged red sweater and pinkish jeans trousers, and a thin, fair-faced, eager-eyed girl in a drab cotton dress as shapeless as a sack, her pipe-stem legs showing above wide, broad-topped, brass-toed brogans. And yet, even away from the woods and after the transformation, some radiance and fragrance of their recent royalty clung to them.

The days were a white processional, the nights a song of beautiful dreams; but all this could not last. The boy and the girl, thinking nothing of scandal but remembering the advice of old Hooker that she should go to his sister in the mountains, pushed away the subject whenever it arose in their minds, said nothing to each other about it, and went on their ecstatic way. Though they could not know it, the sparsely settled community was buzzing with scandal about them, and even to Crebillon the racy story had run.

A dark afternoon came, cloudy and cold, and they

were in the attic, his vast secret chamber, now hers also by gift of her comrade king. She had put to sleep on pallets, since she said they were unused to beds and restless therein, Marguerite, Gwendolyn, and Arthur, her little children of the road; and he was showing her his collection of bark samples, each with a leaf of its tree pinned to it.

Away downstairs the ancient door-bell jangled. They sat still for a moment staring fearfully at each other; that was the outside world reaching after them, and they were both hermits now and afraid of it.

After a while they stole to the front window and peeped out through the slats of the blind. Two men were opening the big gate leading into the field.

"The short plump one is Cesar Honfleur," whispered Shep. "He's my guardian. He's my cousin too. He's after me, but I'm not afraid of him."

"Who's the great broad-shouldered one with the big black mustache an' the thick neck?"

He had hoped she wouldn't ask that. "He's the sheriff—Tom Biggers."

"What in the world do you reckin they want, Shep?"

"Now, Phoebe, don't look like that. Don't be scared. Mr. Honfleur is always after me to go to

school, or go to work, or something. They'll ride over to see Seneca an' Pomp, an' ask where I am; Cousin Cesar always does that."

"But how come the *sheriff* is with him?" She caught hold of his hand.

"Well, I can't make that out just now, Phoebe. But when they're out of sight, we've got to get away, to the woods. Maybe *he* came about your father. You know, Phoebe, when anybody dies without the help of a regular doctor the officers have to do something or other about it, an' they take charge of the man's estate, an' have doin's in the courts about it. I never thought of that before."

"Yes, Shep, an' if they git us up in court—"

"They'll send you away, Phoebe. They'll be out of sight in a minute. Then we'll run."

"Oh, Shep, don't let 'em git me! I don't want to go away; not yit, Shep, not yit, *please.* I reckin maybe after a while—"

"They're not goin' to have you, Phoebe." He put his right arm around her shoulder, as boys do their chosen comrades, and stood up very straight.

They stayed in the woods until after dark, and then crept up to Loretta's house. While they ate supper there they asked what the town men had wanted.

"Ever'body knows about you two," said Loretta,

winking her left eye wickedly, her face, the color of creamed coffee, shining with joyous deviltry. "But we never told them men nothin' much, Mr. Shep; jest a little to make 'em think we was tellin' ever'thing. But they're after you all, you better look out. Naw, an' we ain't goin' to tell 'em nothin' neither."

Loretta had cooked many years for the Tideboys, Shep had almost lived in the kitchen when she was there because she was so lively, and besides there is always between fugitives and the black people the quick old brotherhood of the hunted.

"I listened while they talked outside, Mr. Shep," ran on Loretta, shooing her children back into the other room, "an' I made out that they're meanin' to rassle some men together to-morrow an' round you all up. Don't ask me what for; it's no manner o' use askin' me, 'cause I jest don't know. But you all better look out."

"Did they go back to town, Loretta?"

Shep stood up and moved toward the door, as if ready to run, holding his comrade by the hand.

"They said they would ride over to Mr. Embree's to spend the night an' to ask him to help whoop up the crowd."

"That's five miles away. Come on, Phoebe."

"Wait a minute, Mr. Shep. Remember, I ain't

seen you all, an' I ain't told you nothin'. If you come again, always come after dark. We'll he'p you if we can." Walking close to him, the handsome, swaggering, middle-aged woman with a grand manner of her own, leaned over and whispered, "Lawsy, mercy, boy, she shore is a fancy little trick." And laughing gustily she opened the door and let the frightened runaways out into the cold, raw black night.

"Shep, we ain't done nothin' for the sheriff to bother about. How come they're after us like this? Hit looks like they think we've done somethin' too terrible to talk about. Hit makes me mad, an' I've a good mind to wait around the big house to-morrow an' tell 'em to go right to hell. By gannies, I have that."

"Phoebe!" They had been walking in single file. Now he waited in the broadening of the path, and put his arm around her shoulder.

"How come you say 'Phoebe' like that, Shep?"

"I never heard a girl swear before."

"Well, Shep, when my bile rises I got to let it out. An' anyway that ain't swearin'. I've heared preachers say 'hell' many a time. An' besides I don't mind if hit is, I'm dogged if I do."

"Phoebe, I tell you, it's not you they're after; it's me—about school or something"

He tried not to let her know how worried he was. His boy's imagination, stimulated by Loretta's news, was building terrifying theories. Maybe they even suspected in town that he had killed the old man of the road, for his money and his daughter. If the sheriff was getting up a crowd to hunt him the matter was more serious than school; a posse indicated to his rural mind not only crime suspected but crime of the most atrocious sort. "Shucks, it's nothing at all, Phoebe," he said out loud. "An' besides they'll not catch us."

"Yes, Shep, but you're in a blue funk all the same. I can see that as plain as a ram's horn."

"I'm *not* scared. There's nothing to be scared about. They bother me, that's all."

Fearing a surprise capture in the big house, they brought down to the great loft of the stable blankets, a frying pan, a coffee-pot, a few tin dishes, some easily transportable supplies, the ax and his shot-gun; and lay down on beds of sweet-smelling corn fodder, prepared and resolved to take to the woods at dawn.

"Don't you worry, Phoebe," Shep called over from one end of the loft. "Nothing can hurt us. Good night."

"No, I won't," she answered from the other end. "Good night, Shep, an' sleep tight. I'm sorry I said

that about hell. When my passions rise I ain't no lady, I reckin. But we'll bumfoozle 'em yit, we will that."

Shep lay on his back staring up into the darkness, listening to the slow drizzle of rain tapping tiny soft blows on the shingles just above his head. He was planning for the immediate future. Across the bayou would be the safest place to go, in the deep pine woods. It was always dim under the big trees, and dryer there in bad weather than anywhere else outside. He would build a shelter of boughs which, with the aid of the thick-topped pines, would protect them from the heaviest rain. And Phoebe could sleep in it at night.

If he ran out of supplies he would have Seneca or Pomp bring things for him from town. He had some money of his own, and there was left from the purse of Hooker Dibble, after the coffin had been paid for, over twenty dollars. And besides, if the worst came to the worst, the negroes would feed them through the winter.

But sometime or other, if the sheriff wanted him badly, he would be caught; he and Phoebe couldn't live in the woods for years without being seen by someone in league with the law. What then? A hot flush of fury flamed through him, his ears clicked inside, and his eyes saw a flash as if he had been

hit on the head; and then he was suddenly cold. Well, he had his shot-gun.

But, shucks, the sheriff *couldn't* want him badly. Mr. Biggers and Cesar Honfleur would get tired after a day or so and go on away, and that would be the end of it all. And yet he was deeply troubled. Sleep would not come quickly to him, though he wanted it to come. There would be work to do the next day, he told himself with sober foresight, and he must be ready. He had been dragged out of a life of drifting serenity, uncomplicated and unworried, and pushed into all this turmoil; responsibility had subdued him, had stimulated him too, compelling him to look carefully ahead to avoid mischance. Yes, he must go to sleep at once and gather a lot of new strength, like a spent old hound behind the stove, who could wake on the morrow and go tearing away as if he had never been tired.

He wondered about his hounds. As for food, they could take care of themselves if necessary. But maybe they'd give him away with their bellowing while he and Phoebe were in the woods. Where were they now? They had been about with him and her that day, faring out for two or three miles on their own and then trailing him, staying a while and then going off again. Still, they might do him good by misleading his pursuers. They didn't bel-

low often when they were on his trail or when they were with him; they made the woods ring only when they were after game. If the posse went to the hounds when they were in full cry it would catch nothing, except maybe a rabbit or an old fool possum fiddlin' around in the daytime. He smiled in the dark at the fancied discomfiture of the enemy.

Where in the *world* would all this end? He didn't know, didn't know; only they were after him, and if they caught him and Phœbe they'd send her straight away, and she didn't want to go, and he didn't want her to go, now.

He sat up and strained to hear if she were asleep. He couldn't catch the sound of her breathing, for the rain was drumming on the roof. He lay down again and began recalling pictures of her—the way she would sometimes lift her chin and shake her head vigorously as if to throw back from her face a great lot of yellow hair, though it would not be loose at all but combed smoothly over her head and done in that tremendous flat knob at the back of her neck; the way she would bite her little white teeth upon her red under lip when she was excited and holding herself in; and that strange look often in her blue eyes when they would be wide open, as they walked along or sat together, as if she were seeing through forests and across miles and miles of

land and over months and months of time—what in the kingdom was she looking for then?

With Phoebe in his mind, the little drums on the roof, the sweet smell of sun-cured corn leaves in his nostrils, his body warm and cozy in his blanket, Shepherd Dessaix Tideboy, his lips smiling, entered with his eyes shut a great white gate as high as a boy's dreams; and having entered he put on armor so bright that the sun leaped back from it, mounted a huge red horse with hairy legs, dashed into the midst of a hundred or so people, tore from their grasp a girl with blue eyes and yellow hair, and galloped away.

And they didn't dare follow him either, though two men—a short plump one with black eyes and a great broad one with a tremendous black mustache—were waving their arms and shouting and trying to get the others to follow them in the chase. So he rode on and on, going so fast across many bridges that the planks of the flooring made a great clattering, on and on around countless green bends of the road. She was riding behind him, and after a while she said, laughing out loud and very easy and gay as if she were no longer the least bit afraid, "We'll bumfoozle 'em yit, won't we, Shep?"

· III ·

The Desperate Thing

THE rain beat its little drums all night long, and the wind, rising at dawn, blew the bugles of a day new and clear. But the loft of the stable, with only one board window and it shut to, was still dim and quiet. A round stream of light from a knothole in the eastern wall shot through the pungent dusk, and here and there through thin cracks the sun barred the grayness with stripes of streaming white.

Shep turned over, drew the blanket half-way over his head to shut away something, and slept on; and Phoebe lay quiet, her lips apart, breathing slowly, steadily, easily. They had walked too much the day before, and ridden too far during the night beyond the great white gate, to come back quickly.

Outside, a group of men opened the big gate leading into the field. One of them pointed at two red hounds down by the stable door scratching at it, whimpering and looking up. The men walked on eagerly, leading their horses, and at the door two of them, a short plump one and a great broad one,

whispering to the others to stay out, entered the stable.

Looking around sharply, the two men mounted the ladder going up to the loft. When they both stood up on the loft floor a board creaked. Phoebe moistened her lips, turned over uneasily, suddenly sat up. Her blue eyes opened wide. She looked across at the still sleeping knight, who had not come back outside the white gate; and, getting up without a word, she walked slowly toward him, swaggering her shoulders and swishing her skirts outrageously. Phoebe's bile was rising, her ladyship sinking. As she passed close to the two men she stuck out her tongue and hissed, "You think you're damned smart, don't you?" Mr. Biggers grinned, Mr. Honfleur bowed profoundly.

Kneeling by the knight of the great red horse and putting her hands tenderly on his shoulders as if she hated to call him back, she shook him gently; and, bending low, whispered, "Wake up, Shep; they've got us, but don't you mind." He shifted his body, moaned luxuriously and tried to pull the blanket entirely over his head. "No, no, Shep; you *must* wake up; you've jist *got* to wake up." She shook him harder.

The two men, standing still by the top of the ladder, were broadly grinning at each other. She

looked viciously at them, lifted her chin and shook her head.

"By gannies, I'll say it afore he wakes up to hear me. You can jist, the pair of you, go straight to hell."

The sheriff bellowed with laughter, and Shep leaped up, his long legs all tangled in the blanket. He reached down for the shot-gun lying near his fodder bed, but Phoebe threw her arms around him. "No, no, Shep, we ain't a-goin' to have none o' that about me. I ain't worth it."

"Mr. Biggers, what do you want with me?" Shep glared at the sheriff.

"Let's all sit down, my boy, an' don't get excited." Making a seat for himself and Mr. Honfleur with piled-up bundles of fodder, he sat down and motioned to the little black-eyed man to do likewise.

"Now, light into him, Cesar," prompted the sheriff, "an' give him a layin' out he won't forget. Then I'll say my say."

Mr. Honfleur was not equal to sitting down, such was the raging passion in him. He began pacing up and down with short quick steps. Shep and Phoebe stood away from him, holding hands, waiting.

"Shepherd, my tall infant, you have pierced me

to the heart. Will you now attend my words? They are the words of a blood-relative, of a friend of your father, of your guardian by law. I ask it but I expect no reply. When have you ever attended me? Never!

"I pursue you for your own benefit. You secrete yourself in the woods in the manner of a savage. I write you. But you call not at the post-office, the letters are returned to me. Nevertheless reports come to me; Cesar Honfleur possesses information.

"Please consider the following. That splendid grandmother of yours dies and you are seventeen. You are the heir of the Tideboys and of the Dessaix, two names of excellent repute. Therefore much is required of you by duty. Your grandmother instructed you, but that is not enough. There is school to attend, college to follow. The estate is not rich, assuredly not rich now, but it can pay for that. After the instruction some place in the world of credit to your families—the Tideboys, the Dessaix. A planter, a counselor, a physician, anything that is of honor. It is for you to say. No one shall propel you into this or that.

"Ha, I say duty demands, but duty touches you not. No, absolutely not. You remain on the plantation, yes, but it declines into a nothingness. Weeds

take it and the low pine trees. It is a wilderness, you a wild boy, a savage, a barbarian, a country loafer. Bah!"

Mr. Honfleur raised both arms, his fists clinched, and brought them down suddenly with great force, figuratively crushing the young barbarian. Then he went on. Shep stared over his head, and Phoebe from time to time stuck out her tongue at him.

"I watch and wait. 'Be patient, Cesar Honfleur,' I counsel myself. 'Excellent material is in the boy. He will recover. He will presently emerge from those wild woods. He will be a citizen of famous repute yet. Therefore pursue him not too swiftly. Also note it well, Cesar Honfleur, the boy drinks not, carouses not, digs not in the slush of scandal.' So I counsel myself while I wait patiently. I discover a small germ of comfort in your conduct.

"No scandal! Ha, ha! I laugh, but my heart breaks. Behold this now. It is a disgrace. I rejoice that your father, your sainted mother, your magnificent grandmother Jeanne are not present to see this."

"See what, Cousin Cesar?" The tall boy straightened his shoulders, frowning, the pupils of his eyes so dilated that the grayness of them was almost lost. Phoebe put both hands on his right arm.

"Ha, speak not to me. The whole parish laughs.

You are a byword, a putridity to the ears. 'See what, Cousin Cesar!' Savage, loafer, ignoramus, now a subject for ten thousand sneers. 'See what, Cousin Cesar!' He requests information. To live around for weeks with that young lady! Heretofore only I, Cesar Honfleur, attended you; now all attend you. No, my tall infant, you are not famous, as I hoped; no, assuredly not; but you are at this finish infamous."

"Why, I don't understand you, sir. What do you mean? What ought I to have done?"

"Ha, he requires my advice when it is too late. You should have come to your relative and your guardian for advice in a difficult situation. If you had been civilized you would have been in touch with me. Yes, but also had you been civilized you would have conducted yourself as a gentleman. You send to Crebillon for a coffin. Why not come yourself? Then you could have approached my office and said, 'Cousin Cesar, I shall be grateful for advice in this matter.' Then all would have been well. It is my duty as a blood-relative and as your guardian to give you advice. It is my privilege to give assistance to the son of my friend.

"All the facts I have not, but sufficient to return a general answer to your question, now, when it is too late. You should have assisted the young lady

to proceed to her relatives immediately upon the interment of her father. If circumstances demanded that she remain for a few days you should have brought her to Crebillon. We should have taken care of her, myself or your Aunt Lydia Pilduff. If circumstances absolutely demanded that she remain for a time on the plantation they also demanded that you ask an elderly lady to be present. This young lady's reputation, her honor—"

"You can jist keep your mouth off my honor, Mr. Fire-Eater. If hit's *my* honor you leave it alone. I'll trust it to Shep an' never worry a single minute about it afterward, an' that's a fact. He did offer to he'p me to git away to my Aunt Nannie, but I kept puttin' it off an' puttin' it off because I hate the old sister. There ain't nothin' Shep wasn't willin' to do for me. So you let him alone. He won't say nothin' for fear he'll tell on me. I 'low I ain't never had no reputation, an' as for my honor hit's as sound, I reckin, as it ever was. So there!"

Mr. Honfleur bowed low, and proceeded, his smooth round face furiously red.

"If it appeared, my tall infant, that the young lady was necessary to your happiness, you should have come to me; also consulted your Aunt Lydia. Preparations for your marriage—"

"Shucks, I'd marry her in a minute if she'd have

me, Cousin Cesar. But I'm only a country loafer, as you say, sir, an' maybe I couldn't support her. Besides you'd hardly ask a young lady to marry you right after her father had died, would you?"

"Shep, honey, you could have me jist whenever you want me, an' you know it, but I'm not a-goin' to let *nobody* drive you into marryin' me. By gannies, I'll even go to Aunt Nannie before that."

"Perhaps that is the answer, my dear young lady." Mr. Honfleur looked as pleased as his pompous rôle permitted.

"Well, then, that's settled." Phoebe strode away from Shep and plumped herself down on a pile of crackling fodder, sitting severely aloof and silent, holding her chin in her hands.

Shep stood now with his head down, scraping the dust of the floor with one foot, covered with confusion and shame, twisting his long hands together. Overawed by age, or his notion of the infallible wisdom of age, crushed by a new sense of guilt at having exposed Phoebe through his fancied negligence to a hurt he hadn't thought of, he delivered himself into the hands of the enemy, thinking that thus he could the better serve her.

They quizzed him about old Hooker's death, decided that nothing was actually wrong there and that the matter had better be dropped, and arranged

for Shep to hand over the wagon and team and the effects of the old man of the road to the sheriff in town next day, when Mr. Honfleur would, he promised threateningly, talk further about his young kinsman's doubtful future. Borrowing a saddle-horse from one of the neighbors downstairs for Phoebe to ride, they prepared to return to Crebillon, taking her with them.

She accepted all their decisions without argument, asked if it were allowed that she cook breakfast for Shep and herself, and having done so she ate without words, her wide blue eyes looking away as if indeed she were seeing through forests and over miles and miles of cleared land and across vast stretches of time. By ten o'clock she was mounted on the borrowed horse, sitting on an old side-saddle supplied by Shep from the stable, cloaked, hatted, and very quiet.

Mr. Biggers, who had taken charge of Phoebe's small valise, containing nothing on earth but a nightgown and the black note-book with Hooker Dibble's precious remedies written in it, stood ready to ride. The boy and the girl hadn't been left alone since their capture. Shep had lifted her into the saddle and now stood holding the bridle of her horse while the two men tightened girths and fussed about before mounting their horses.

"Well, Shep, I've caused you a powerful lot of trouble since I driv into that big gate yander that stormy night, an' pappy so sick I just *had* to find shelter soon. I reckin maybe you're sorry you ever seed me." She looked down at him, her blue eyes suddenly darkened.

"Phoebe, don't!" He wanted to say many things, and he would have said them now despite the presence of the two men, but he could find no words for the splendid fluttering shapes in his heart. He came to her stirrup and raised his eyes to hers. "Would you mind, Phoebe, if I visit you up there in Arkansas sometime?"

"Right soon, Shep? Oh, make it soon!"

"Just as soon as I can fix up things here an' get some new clothes. Phoebe, nobody will ever know what you are to me, for I could not tell them if I tried. Do you remember, Phoebe, that day on the hillside when we lay an' watched—"

"Here, here," said Mr. Biggers, "we've got to be movin' on. They're beginnin' to 'remember' things, an' there'll be no end of *that*."

"Well, good-by, Shep!"

"Good-by, Phoebe!" He leaned over and kissed her hand, and as he bent his head she stooped and touched his hair with her lips.

And three cantered away, and one ran after them

and stood in the road straining his eyes and waving his hand desperately when she turned to look back. And then they were lost behind a clump of trees.

Shep went to the kitchen and sat by the stove staring at the wall, now and then brushing the back of his hand across his eyes.

After a while he stood up, squared his shoulders, hurried out into the field, caught Hooker Dibble's horses and brought them to the stable. Having fed them and cooked his dinner, he set to packing the effects of his late guests into the emptied medicine chest. This was to be sent on to Phoebe. What disposition was to be made of the wagon and team he didn't know; he would deliver it the next day to the sheriff, as agreed, and let the officer attend to that matter.

He climbed to the attic to bring down Phoebe's three dolls. Those veteran travelers with the fancy names lay on the pallets where she had left them, with all manner of tender but stern cautions, he remembered, to remain perfectly quiet until she should return. He knelt at their feet looking long at them, and then he lifted up the yellow-haired Gwendolyn, pressed her against his bosom and rocked himself back and forth, his eyes closed tight and breathing very hard.

By sundown the chest had been packed and re-

packed several times, and now at last it was roped and ready for shipment. He had greased the dry axles of old Hooker's wagon, polished the metal of the harness, curried and brushed the two horses until they shone. After all, these were Phoebe's horses until they were sold.

He had worked steadily, vigorously, and passionately since she had ridden away. His energy and thoroughness were manifestations of a fresh resolution in his mind. He meant to be in the future a person very different from the country loafer he had himself sneered at before Cesar Honfleur, and sneered at sincerely. All afternoon he had mocked and thundered at himself as he went about his work. For three years he had been a nobody, worse than a nobody, that people laughed at, it seemed; now he would be somebody. And he would go up to see Phoebe.

Just how he was to transform himself he did not clearly see, or try to see, at the moment. It was too early for details. But getting to know things, achieving civilization, as Cesar had intimated, was to be an important part of the change. Innocently he had accepted all Mr. Honfleur's talk as entirely wise and honest, never suspecting exaggeration or shrewd bluffing to make a point, for was not Cesar one of the sacred elect, a grown man; and Shep had

felt intolerably awkward, ignorant, foolish, and ashamed.

After supper he went out on the back porch and looked around. The air was clear and keen, the fields white with frosty moonlight. Stepping back into the kitchen and pulling on his red sweater and his wide-brimmed black felt hat, he walked slowly down to the stable, then after a little hesitation on out toward the branch. Good Lord, here he was idly drifting about again; he was going nowhere and would bring back nothing. So he shouted at himself in his mind. But there would be little more of this objectless loafing; and after all he meant this trip to-night to be a kind of farewell to a life paltry and now despised.

The path was sweet under his feet, and the faint smells of dried grass and pine trees and wood-smoke and wild grapes and a dozen other autumn things blended together was good in his nostrils, the innumerable small night sounds soothed and rested him, and presently he was sweeping along, his shoulders back, his head high, whistling softly to himself. He was no longer a guilty loafer. He was walking again with Phoebe, and he remembered something she had said at this place, the look of her at another, the feel of her fidgety moist little hand in his.

Often they had built a fire under the trees down by the branch and had sat looking into the flames. He built a great fire now that leaped up joyfully and spread a generous warmth and a splendid red radiance all about. He sat against a big sweet-gum tree, watching the wood burn and listening to it sing its tiny squeaking song, gratefully conscious of the branch gurgling and laughing behind him.

He closed his eyes, seeing visions of Phoebe now seeming so far away, and when after a while he opened them she was standing on the other side of the fire, her faded floppy red plush hat in one hand, the valise in the other. There was a wicked happy smile on her lips.

"I seed your fire, I knowed you'd be here." She called it to him, waiting, and her voice was like the branch, gurgling and laughing.

He stood up and walked slowly toward her, around the fire, his eyes staring at her.

"Oh, hit's *me,* Shep! Do you think I'm a ghost or something? Are you *glad* to see me back, Shep?"

Moving close to her, he touched both his hands to her shoulders, tentatively.

"Don't you *want* me, Shep? Oh, say something to me, honey. I waited until the road ran through some thick woods, then I asked Mr. Biggers for my valise so as I could find a hanky for my nose, which I

never had in the valise and didn't want nohow. They rid on a little ahead of me, an' I slid off the horse an' slipped in among the trees. They couldn't find me in there, an' they went on to town, I reckin. I stayed hid a long time, an' when sundown came I walked back. Hit was only four or five miles. Shep, I wouldn't let 'em *force* you to have me, but now they're gone. So if you want me—but maybe you don't want me now. Oh, won't you say a single word to me, Shep?"

And suddenly flinging her hat and valise to the ground, she fled down along the branch, blinded with tears, bumping herself against trees, tearing her hands with bamboo briers, and falling face down a dozen yards away, as, shouting to her to stop, he reached to catch hold of her. He picked her up and carried her, a trembling small body, back to the fire. He laid her within the circle of light and warmth, his rolled-up coat for a pillow, and kneeled by her side.

"Oh, Phoebe, Phoebe, didn't you under*stand?* It seemed like I *couldn't* believe it, it was too good. Are you mad at me, Phoebe?"

Lifting her right hand, he kissed the bleeding scratches on it. She pulled his hand down to her breast, and holding it there between hers she closed her eyes.

"Lean down an' kiss me, Shepherd," she whispered, her tense fair face alight. "Kiss my lips, my honey; then you'll *know* hit's me."

And he kissed her lips and her closed eyes, and raising up she slipped her arm around his neck, and pressing her face into his shoulder she began crying again.

"Don't you mind me, Shepherd; a-cryin' this way an' all. I ain't mad or sorry or *anything* like that. Hold me close, Shepherd; oh, hold me closer, Shepherd. . . . I wisht, I wisht—"

"*What* do you wish, Phoebe?"

"I wisht I warn't so little an' skimpy an' ornery-lookin'!"

Hooker Dibble's horses did not draw a wagon to Crebillon the following day. By midnight they were going in the opposite direction, ridden by a tall stern-faced boy and an eager-eyed girl. They were hurrying to the neighboring parish, where, it seemed to them, they could do what had been suggested to them to do, what they now wished to do, more easily, being unknown; and do it also beyond the shadow of compulsion. And so they did, coming back to the big house the next day, he grave and exalted, she equally quiet, her wide blue eyes as if seeing through forests and across miles and miles of cleared land and down long beautiful vistas of time.

· IV ·

All Gaul is Divided—

The big house is alive again. The double front doors are closed but now only because January at last has brought authentic winter to freeze the green pine needles and wave the long limbs like stiffened plumes. Gray smoke rises out of two red chimneys, all the blinds on the eastern side of the ancient mansion are open. The yards are clean and orderly. Chickens and guineas, formerly half wild, stroll about the stable-yard foraging and luxuriating in the morning sun.

Inside you would see Phoebe, dust-capped and aproned, her thin arms bare to the elbow, ardently wrestling with the vast rooms downstairs on the eastern side, for these young Tideboys have put in commission only half the house and are using less than that. She tiptoes about in low-heeled slippers, in all her movements guarding against noise.

Is anyone sick here? No, but up in a front room on the second floor, behind closed doors, a boy is in desperate battle with Julius Cæsar. Sitting be-

fore a table, his head bowed over a book, both his hands clinched in his tow hair, he may not seem to be in active battle, unless you note the puckered wrinkle between his staring eyes, the set of his jaw and the tense agonized expression of his face.

For four hours last night and two this morning he has faced the first sentence in Cæsar's Gallic Wars. The one-time Confederate soldier, now teaching a flock of ten or twelve white children at the new school for whites four miles to the westward, has been engaged grandly by Cesar Honfleur to prepare a suddenly ambitious barbarian for college. Old Hardwick Tackaberry, called "Professor" by his pupils, has told him to read ten pages for the first lesson, remarking that the Gallic Wars are mere child's play to translate.

Perhaps so to a youngster thoroughly grounded in Latin grammar and already practised with easy sentences about love, doves, and the like. But to a boy with little Latin grammar, with only the brief definitions in the inadequate glossary at the back of his book, and in a panic because of his failure to begin translating instantly, that first sentence has been for hours an enigma locked and terrifying.

At 11: 35 A. M. he shoves the book away, rises and walks to the door. He starts slowly down the stairs, his pace quickens and then he is running. He dashes

into the living-room, back into the bedroom, out on the gallery and into the dining-room, calling "Phoebe! Phoebe!"

She meets him at the kitchen door, frightened and fluttering and asking hurried incoherent questions.

"All Gaul is divided into three parts, Phoebe! All Gaul is divided into three parts, and I did it myself and I won't have to ask old Tackaberry now."

Catching her hands, he pulls her out on the porch and they dance around with a great thumping of heels on the floor. There is something here to be celebrated, she feels, and her rosy eager face alternates between blankness and shining joy.

"It's Cæsar, Phoebe! I did that first sentence at last, an' then when I got the hang of the Latin I did the whole page an' the next one in no time. By gannies, Mrs. Tideboy, we'll go to college yet."

"Oh, Shep! Come down an' let me kiss you!"

And so she does, and an old hen down in the stable sets up an excited cackling over a new-laid egg, and the wind whistles around the house, and you are asked to contemplate the lean brown Roman giving ground before young Shep Tideboy and a radiant Phoebe.

Not that she is trying to translate Latin, yet; her educational endeavor these days is merely to school herself into the habit of saying knew for knowed,

asked for axed and in general conducting herself with some show of prim propriety in the English language. No, she isn't discovering behind a lot of outlandish words that all Gaul was divided into three parts; but he who has achieved that remarkable feat is almost herself.

The spirit that conquered Cæsar goes on its triumphant way. Old Hardwick Tackaberry, a scholar marooned in these woods because he is a hilarious and incorrigible periodic drunkard and as dirty as a tramp, dismisses his young flock at four o'clock every afternoon and tutors his special student until six or seven; and when spring comes and the school is closed after a generous four-months' session at public expense the tutoring goes on all day and into the night, except for occasional weeks when the red-bearded sinner slips off to Crebillon to drink and to amaze bar-room audiences by reciting Shakespeare's plays straight through in his deep booming voice.

Shep's little hawk-nosed Granny Jeanne has done well by him except in Latin and Greek and mathematics, old Tackaberry says, after considering the requirements of available colleges and universities. But when September arrives he tells the boy to go on and try the entrance examinations; and Cesar Honfleur is furious when he hears that the young

savage, in order to evade his multitude of cousins in New Orleans, has elected to go across Louisiana's western border and throw himself at the University of Texas in Austin. If he fails to pass there, Shep tells himself, he will have no swarm of relatives at hand asking how it happened.

Behold then the shutting up of the big house once more, the excited shopping of Phoebe in Crebillon preparing for the campaign among the sages, the tearful farewells from his cousin Cesar, who kisses them both on the cheek several times, and from his portly Aunt Lydia Pilduff, who shakes his hand and tells him to be a good boy and write her a letter now and then, and who whispers something into Phoebe's ears. Behold a long-legged hobbledehoy blinking his gray eyes rapidly as the train moves out of the station; for though he has been wild to get away, now that he is going a great lump is strangely in his throat.

In Austin, that pleasant little city of white limestone, set on a broad river sometimes yellow and sometimes gray, among green hills and rocky pastures, Phoebe and he search, not for a place to board, but for a house; a very small house because, for one thing, two thousand dollars must pay all their expenses while he is attempting to transform himself from a juvenile barbarian to a civilized doctor or

lawyer or engineer—he hasn't yet decided what profession is to have him. And even if he fails to pass the entrance examinations he is to stay and be tutored until he can; such is his firm resolve.

A house, yes, because the exalted little girl of camp-fire and road is in love with her new rôle of housewife, for the moment.

· V ·

Hooker Dibble's Daughter

It is quite true that in the last days of the quaint nineteenth century a president of the university in Austin called nearly a thousand students together and begged them to spare enough time from study to take an hour or two of exercise every day in the open air. He talked athletics, but he felt no general response in his audience. "Then go," he pleaded, peevish at the anticlimax, "for a trolley-car ride on the belt-line." The university on its vast green hill, long before endowed with public lands by pioneer fathers who often wore blankets to their seats in the legislative chamber, was like a prospectors' camp, the students madly digging for the gold of learning.

There was a tense spirit of adventure about the place. Not a few scholars from older states and far-away nations had come to it chiefly because they felt the call to teach in the Texas university as a call to attempt something difficult, daring, and possibly rich with strange passionate contacts.

Middle-aged cowboys suddenly awakened to a

new hunger, diffident yearning sons and daughters from lonely cotton and wheat farms, women of all ages snatching alternate years from teaching and stenography or any work whatsoever that would enable them to save money for board and books, gusty practising lawyers long before admitted to the bar after ten-minute oral examinations but now craving something more than a smattering of Blackstone, berserker boys in the engineering department dreaming in terms of transcontinental railroads, quite students of all sorts and conditions in love with science and eager to serve her ardently and exactly all their lives long if only someone would mercifully show them how, these and such as these made the air of the place, and Shep was presently breathing deep this heady atmosphere and more than a little drunk on it.

Some students had come with their families, so he did not feel odd because he had brought a wife and set up housekeeping. Phoebe and he had rented a four-room furnished frame cottage a dozen blocks from the university, on the verge of the college settlement, with a wide clear view of the cedar-clad hills and of those immense flaming floating sunsets of the Southwest that always caught his heart and brought to Phoebe's eyes that look as of seeing down long beautiful vistas.

The small brown house on the rim of the settlement had neither gas nor electricity, deliveries were made by distant stores only when an order of sizable importance was given, and often you could have seen a long-legged boy in one of Crebillon's best black suits, with trousers too long and sleeves too short, drifting along the streets in the late afternoon with an oil can in his hand and his head full of the Hittite wars, distressingly irregular verbs and geometrical figures all cluttered about their corners with letters of the alphabet.

There was no servant in the house; the establishment was run on lines of heroic economy. Young wives often begin their careers in a mood almost miserly, and he was willing enough to let Phoebe do as she pleased about their household affairs. She gave orders, he obeyed.

Turning the pages of the university catalogue, he saw a gorgeous array of courses he would like to take. They would require fifteen or twenty years, and he had money for four only, at the most; and there was professional training to follow. Cesar Honfleur had exaggerated in his fervid speech back home in the stable loft as to the ability of the estate to pay for academic and professional training. He had defended himself later, smiling handsomely, by

saying that he had been speaking of one boy, not a family.

A month after matriculation Shep had pushed aside the subject of a post-graduate profession for consideration far in the future. For the moment, he could think only of the enticing immediate things. Mathematics was to him a clean breathless contest with a thrill at every solution, languages were singing joys, history a beckoning light moving back across peoples and things and ideas now strange and new, now suddenly old and familiar, always richly varied and suggesting more fascinating contacts further on.

Four years! He had the notion, he could have had nothing clearer then, that in such a snip of time he could only savor the fragrance and glimpse the beauty of something sweet and vast and shining that could be won only with work almost boundless and probably far beyond his abilities even if he had large wealth and many years. Nevertheless he would now try to discover and mark for possible future use the approaches to that kingdom of scholarship which he could dimly see.

Old Hardwick Tackaberry, for all his drunkenness and his pot of cabbage that he carried from his cabin to the school for midday dinner, had pene-

trated to the outskirts of the kingdom, and Shep felt that many of his new teachers were full citizens there. Sometime he too might seriously attempt to win a place among them. It was something to be dreamed about anyway.

Phoebe and he in those early days laid down a thrillingly stern schedule of self-denial and hard work. She was to enter a public school, and they were to coöperate with the housework, sending the clothes to a laundry and having a woman in once a week to give the four-room cottage a thorough cleaning. Everything else they would do themselves. But they agreed that they would ease up on their housework if they discovered that their money would go further than they thought or if they had a lucky financial windfall of any sort.

They were both in a state of exaltation, of driving excitement, and had been since their first days with Hardwick Tackaberry. Their daring decision to come out of the woods and descend upon a seat of learning, his romantic rides to the old soldier's school-room and later to the log cabin where he lived alone, Phoebe's ardent endeavors to put half the big house in order and to be a full-fledged captain of a home of her own, their shopping for the new venture, their leaping hopes for the future, the hurry and bustle of their departure, the trip on the

train, the strange city and the still stranger college settlement, all this ministered to her craving for movement, color, and high moments.

She now threw herself into a public school with ambitious eagerness. She was put in classes with well-coached city children of from ten to twelve, and though she made a face over this stab at her pride she vowed, by gannies, she'd stick to it.

To his suggestion that he teach her she replied: "Why use up your time, honey, when I can have instruction free gratis for nothin'? I'll make out to live somehow with them learned tots in my classes, doggone their smart little hides."

What sharp and fresh appetites they brought to the world within their reach! The hills and the country were at their back door, and they took long unhurried walks, built fires, boiled coffee and cooked parts of their lunch, talked endlessly and shouted like children to make echoes against steep rocky walls.

They took the fancy churches downtown in turn Sunday after Sunday, she curiously watching the people and soaking in the music, he interested in the historical allusions of the sermons. Saturday nights they went to the one theater, to the peanut gallery filled with students, seeing "Faust," "Hamlet," musical comedies that delighted and scandal-

ized Phoebe, black-face minstrel shows, "East Lynne," "Ghosts," anything and everything that happened to be playing there on a week-end, suspending disbelief the moment they sat down and coöperating with the actors from beginning to end.

Circumstances made so many high moments for them, and they made so many for themselves, that the dull times were offset; and so the first year of their daring experiment passed, and they were glowingly proud of their scholastic records.

At Phoebe's suggestion, they bought a team and a second-hand wagon, traveled slowly back to Crebillon, sold the outfit there, had a vacation in a lush green country that made rocky Austin seem a desert memory, rode back by train in the autumn, and settled down for the second year.

It was indeed a settling down this time. The bloom was off the experiment for high-spirited little Phoebe. The thrill of her brand-new adventure was gone. She was not so gay as she had been, and she could not now cure so easily with her humor the sting of her position among the learned tots. Nevertheless she buckled down to her increasingly unpleasant school chores with a silent courage that he did not sufficiently appreciate, he is now sure, at that time.

He took on extra courses, having decided to at-

tempt four years' credits in three, as is often done; and dug deeper in the most interesting studies he had begun the year before, especially in history. There were plenty of high moments for him, few for Phoebe. Luck was on his side. In other work in another place most of the high moments might easily have been hers. In this particular venture, through no virtue of his making, the stimulating and satisfying moments were his.

The second summer they didn't leave Austin. A malarial fever kept him in bed for a month, and Phoebe was physically sick with worry and fear. Then he set to work digging deeper into his beloved Middle Ages, and it had been officially hinted to him that if he could graduate the following summer he would be given a fellowship in history. What a glittering prospect that was for the long-legged barbarian from the piney woods! To be able to earn $300 a year and at the same time to continue his prowling in the alluringly dim, groping, passionately sincere old mid-centuries!

He had carried his anticipated triumph to Phoebe, and they had celebrated with dinner at the best hotel and at the theater, where Lewis Morrison was giving his perennial presentation of "Faust" and the devil and *Marguerite,* which they had already seen but enjoyed to the last moment nevertheless. Phoebe

loved the beautiful and almost damned *Marguerite* all the more for her name.

Stimulated by his triumph—he rated it no less than that—Shep began planning gorgeously for the future. There was a great Eastern university with a history chief who was himself absorbed in the Middle Ages, with a library supposed to contain America's most complete collection of books on the period.

The goal of Shep's planning now was that university. He doubted if he could ever get there, or stay there long if he did reach it; its tuition was not free, as at Austin, and living expenses up there would be appalling. But he could aim at it in his most ambitious moments as a possibility of the future, the rather distant future since he would need to teach and save for three or four years at least; and he could talk about it to Phoebe in the thin, still, expansive hours after midnight as they lay in bed with the world about them dark and quiet and romantic, the stars beckoning at him through the window.

At first Phoebe was obviously as elated about the future as he was, but presently he noticed that her blue eyes were looking absently down long vistas again; eyes strained and tormented.

Despite his absorption he could not escape worry about her. He took her case to Beddoes, Heydler,

and Vallati for advice. They were friends—three world-wandering young men halted for a while in Austin to work and get the feel of the Southwest country before going on their separate ways. They were all teaching Fellows, Vallati in French, Beddoes and Heydler in history. They frankly envied Shep his home and especially his Elizabethan Phoebe, as they called her.

Consulted now, they said to him, Beddoes speaking: "For God's sake, don't study through another summer. Run off somewhere with her on a trip if you have to hoof it. And get her away from those kids in the public school. She doesn't need algebra and grammar and all that stuff anyway. She takes it all too seriously. She fusses herself to a frazzle about examinations that don't test anything except a memory for dates, names, exactly worded rules and other such dried-up things. All that stuff hasn't much to do with Elizabethan Phoebe anyway; she'll absorb what she needs. And send that damned little hired piano back where it came from. What's she got to do with running the tinny scales; she's music enough herself."

The general purport of all this young Shep suggested to young Phoebe. Nevertheless she doggedly stood by her rented piano and the learned young tots in the public school. But she confessed that she often

cut classes and spent hours restlessly prowling about the city. She would sometimes go into the capitol and sit an entire afternoon listening to the windy speeches of state representatives. "Poor little Phoebe!" said Beddoes.

She continued to be excited and keen about his progress all during the third year. By May it was clear that he could graduate in June and get his history job. It had been decreed that all prospective bachelors of art, science, literature, and what-not should buy caps and gowns, to be worn during commencement week certainly, and probably on other purple occasions. Shep was furious about this departure from the university's old simplicities, though Phoebe was delighted. She would compel him to put on the black ceremonial garb and parade around the room while she applauded with shining eyes. She would kiss him often and sometimes cry, he fatuously thinking her tears were all for prideful joy.

One Sunday in June Beddoes, Vallati, and Heydler had supper with them. They not infrequently dropped down on the Tideboys without warning; without warning so that Phoebe couldn't bother herself in advance about preparations. And then they liked to have her drive them out to get in rye bread, beer, cheese, sausage, and other materials for an

impromptu meal. But that Sunday she walked across the street to a neighbor's house and telephoned them to come. She set on the table chicken à la king, a multitude of hot brown muffins, a mountain of sweet butter, lettuce salad, and a jar of honey, plus of course a huge pot of coffee. That supper was a glorious feast. So said the bachelor guests. After it was over she led Beddoes into the living-room for a private conference.

He came back after a few minutes, excited and, it seemed to Shep, very much worried. "Elizabethan Phoebe is dramatizing again," he announced, forcing a smile on his handsome boyish but heavily bearded face. "She orders you, Shepherd Dessaix Tideboy, to prepare for a preliminary graduation. You have passed all examinations, she tells me, and are entitled to a diploma. Probably she wants to practise you in your part as well as to show you off in your new finery.

"I am to play the president because, please God, I have this terrible auburn growth on my cheeks, which she says is worse than prexy's. So don't be jealous anybody. Heydler's black mustache is an outstanding miracle, but it is not a beard. And poor Vallati's ascetic face is as clean as young Shep's.

"I am to go, hell bent for heaven, she commands, across town to get my old cap and gown. Meanwhile

she is dressing for the great event. Heydler, you and Vallati are to be the awed audience, together with herself, who is, I gather, to play the part of a mother come to see her only son, of whom she is 'powerful proud,' receive the sacred scroll."

Shep thought that plan was putting Beddoes to considerable trouble, and he threatened to stop the play.

"No," said Beddoes, "let's do it. She wants it very much, and what she wants in the mood she's in today she shall have if I can give it to her. What do you others say?" He looked at stiff-backed little Heydler and dark grave Vallati, his smooth face as beautiful as women's faces sometimes are.

"What she wishes," said Heydler, "I to her should give."

"Assuredly," said Vallati.

"Well, Val, you do up a few nice rolls of white paper to put on the little table in the living-room to serve as hand-made diplomas. She won't like it if we don't carry it off properly. Now I'm off. I'll be back in fifteen minutes. I'm plump and thirty-two, but I can do a mile in something less than an hour yet."

Shep went into the bedroom to get his hated ceremonial outfit and ribbon to make the dummy diplomas pretty. The ribbon was Vallati's idea. She was

curling her hair, and he noticed that as she held the iron over the chimney of a coal-oil lamp her hand trembled.

"Do you mind, Shepherd? I like to play." Most of the time he was "Shep" to her; she called him Shepherd only when she was very solemn. She didn't look at him, and her voice was sounding things that cried out to him. He couldn't understand, but he walked over and bending down kissed the wave she had just made in her shining yellow hair; and was full of a vague remorse.

"The Queen commands, her subjects obey, gladly. We all like to play, Phoebe, when it's with you. Maybe I don't play enough these days. I'll try to do better in the future. The worst grind is over, I believe; maybe we can ease up now and play more. I don't know much about playing but you'll teach me, and I want you to."

"No, no, Shepherd! Don't say *that!*"

He was standing behind her. She leaned back against him and covered her face with her hands. "We're what we are, honey." It occurred to him that her low voice was far too serious for the moment. "We can't help it, Shepherd. You must go on an' study an' study; you'll be happy, an' I'll be happy knowin' you are, an' you'll be a great scholar. I'm already proud of you, I'll be prouder some day.

There, I hear Will Beddoes back, an' my hair's not ready yet."

The diplomas were piled on the little square table with the eternally uneven legs in the living-room. Beddoes sat on one side of it, a grave and pontifical bulk, his face puzzled and troubled. Vallati and Heydler, the awed audience, occupied two of a row of three kitchen chairs out in front of the table. Shep, capped and gowned, sat in a chair behind them.

He fancied he could see Phoebe preparing to stun the visitors with the sight of her plumed as for the commencement ball; she had collected the plumes over a period of three or four months—the dress one week, the yellow silk stockings and black mantilla another, the gold slippers a month later, and so on and on, spreading the delight, he had thought, to cover as much time as she could. Well, she *would* stun them when she came tripping in; her white shoulders bare, her eyes shining, her head up like a little queen. He of course had begun by looking forward with dread to the ball, but now he was eager to brave its terrors to show her off.

In those days, however it be now, or those nights rather, since they were workmen by day, a half-dozen Mexican musicians would often go strolling through the streets of the university settlement on

warm soft evenings playing before the students' boarding-houses for the small coins thrown to them. Hearing one of these bands a half a block away, Heydler rushed out of the house to engage its services. "A commencement music must have," he said. He brought it back and stationed it outside under a window of the living-room.

After a while Phoebe came slowly in, stopping by the table. Her hair was lovely, powdered white. A narrow green ribbon was close about her neck, a small gold locket pinned to it. Shep had quickly surrendered to spectacles at the university, and she had put on his steel-rimmed glasses. She wore that old drab, pin-checked, cotton dress in which she had come to the hermit boy out of the storm, now faded, patched where her elbows had worn the sleeves through, as shapeless as a sack, and her ancient brogan shoes, newly blacked, the brass toe-plates polished and gleaming.

"Mister," she said to Beddoes, "is this here the place where them smart boys an' gals air a-goin' to graduate?"

"Yes, ma'm, this is the place. Do you think of attending?"

"I shore am. My son graduates to-day, you know. Would you he'p me to a good seat nigh the stage, mister?"

"Yes, ma'm, I'll be glad to." Beddoes rose and showed her to the empty chair between Heydler and Vallati. She crossed her hands in her lap and looked all around the room and up at the ceiling. Then opening a blue cloth sewing bag with a drawstring at the top she took out a big white handkerchief and touched it to her eyes and nose and lips. "*My* boy!" she said in a voice as to herself, bowing her head up and down. "*My* boy, an' him so big now! Hit'll be gran' for him, but I'm afeared I'm a-goin' to lose him. But I'm proud too—aye, Lordy, I am for a fact."

By the window, in the moonlight, the gut-stringed guitars, the violins, and a flute began a Spanish love song. Phoebe snatched open her bag and held her handkerchief hard against her mouth. Beddoes reached over and turned low the wick of the lamp in front of him. June roses came in on the breeze from the southern window.

After a while the musicians went away. The dimmed room was quiet, the audience looked up at the president. Stroking his beard nervously with his left hand, blinking his eyes rapidly, he lifted his great bulk slowly, and cleared his voice.

"Ladies and gentlemen, we are gathered here on this happy occasion to celebrate—"

He said no more; his further speech was panto-

mime, and that was short. He motioned to Shep, who rose, paraded around the room as if he were one of a long line, received with a bow a beribboned diploma, and moved back to Phoebe's chair.

He stood hesitant. Was this the end of the play? She held up her hands to him, and he dropped suddenly on his knees and put his head in her lap. He heard Beddoes and the other tiptoeing out of the room, then the closing of the front door.

The next day Hooker Dibble's daughter took to the road again.

· VI ·

Maybe This Is Love

As a girl Phoebe had two distinct grades of language. One, derived from Hooker Dibble and his associates, she used for common everyday purposes. The other, picked up bit by bit who knows where and laid away in some sweet prim place in her mind, she had brought out only when play-acting with her dolls and with boys and girls she chanced to meet, and even with them only when they were properly sympathetic. Her three years in the Austin school had tamed and leveled down her everyday speech, but it had no doubt enabled her to enlarge her precise, starchy, secret, ceremonial language.

That was the language she had used in letters to Shep's Aunt Lyd and his Cousin Cesar, who had come to depend on her for news of their adventure; and it was the language of the letter the student husband found late the next afternoon when, having been away since morning in the whirl of commencement preparations, he came home.

It was propped up against a dark brown pitcher

in the middle of the dining-room table, filled with fresh pink roses from an opulent Spanish neighbor's yard, and all the little house was sweet with them. After that, whenever he smelled roses he could see the square bulky white envelope with Phoebe's emphatic dark little writing on it—"Mr. Shepherd D. Tideboy"—leaning against the brown pitcher.

Dearest Shepherd:

I am not so very happy any more, and I am going away. I am so discouraged and distressed about myself. I am afraid I am not of much account. But maybe it will be better for both of us. I hope so, Shepherd. I must hope so.

I wish that I could say I knew I was right in doing this, but I cannot. My head is all fuzzy about it. I suspect that often I shall be terribly sorry, and I shall grieve that the idea ever came to me. You will never know how many times I put it away from me, but it would always come back. When I would say, "No, no, Phoebe, you can *not* do that," I would feel nice and warm all over. When I would say, "Yes, but you will do it," I would feel cold and then hot, and I did not know what to think.

Maybe I was married too young. Maybe after a while I should have had enough of the road and should have longed to settle down and be very quiet. Maybe if I had continued to be diligent with my school work this idea would not have come to me. Yes, and my housework has lately been falling off too, Shepherd. You did not notice it, but at last I seemed to lose interest in that also. If I had not met some old friends Pappy Dibble and I knew maybe the idea would not have

kept coming back stronger and stronger. Oh, it is all *so* mixed up. But it looks like I cannot help things piling up and piling up in my mind to push me away, so I will go on. It was a great relief just to decide it one way or the other, I have been wishawashy so long. I cannot *bear* to be wishawashy any longer.

You must not think, Shepherd, that you *did* anything to make me unhappy. I am simply an ornery tramp, I suppose, and nothing else could be made of me.

When I used to ask you to do something very special and would say, "Just to please me, Shep," you would always do it. I cannot remember one time when you did not. Just to please me now, Shepherd, do not bother about me at all. I am with a good family who will take excellent care of me. When you get this we shall be far away, and we shall be moving about swiftly, so you could not catch us if you tried.

I had a mind to go away last winter when my friends were in town, but I thought it might worry you in your studies, and besides I was then not even as certain about it all as I am now, so I told them to come back in June. Well, you are all right about your examinations now, and you have won your fellowship, and I will go this time.

The old man of the family would not take me along, I was afraid, if I told him I was married. I said my aunt had me in school here, and I was about through with it, and was a grown woman and wanted to make my own living if I could, and my aunt was willing. So he was glad to take me. That was a white lie, but I like to believe it was not so *very* wicked because I told it to keep him from worrying and I never hurt anybody by it, I am sure. Of course I cannot wear my rings, but I suppose I should not wear them, now.

Tell Mr. Beddoes and Mr. Heydler and Mr. Vallati good-by for me; also the nice old Spanish gentleman across the street who gave us flowers. I never could remember his name except when I was looking at him. You can make them think I have gone visiting relatives. Next year you can think of other things to tell about why I am not back. I cannot think of any now. Dear me, how many lies there are in this business. But they are not lies to hurt anybody.

And now, Shepherd, I must make a request of you. Will you not keep my dress and slippers and yellow silk stockings and all the pretty things I bought for the commencement ball? I shall need silk stockings in the work I am to do, but I would not wear my commencement stockings for *that*.

You remember how you joked me about buying a little at a time? When I had decided to stay I would buy the slippers, or the dress, or the black mantilla, or the silk pretties to go beneath, but not everything at once because I was afraid the idea to go might come back too strong for me after all, so there would be a waste, and you will need all your money for your studies. Maybe I should not ask you to keep these particular things because they mark the times when I was saying, "No, no, Phoebe, you can *not* do that." But I do love them so. I have taken with me the old brogans and the dress I wore when I drove into your big gate.

Maybe you will be breaking up housekeeping now, and be going to board, where you will have no chores to do and no worries and bothers, and can give all your time to your studies. But my commencement outfit will not take up much room, and you could leave them at the big house when you go home again. It has plenty of space.

If you marry again you could tell your wife that the dress

and things were your mother's. That would be only a white lie. Would you not tell a white lie for me, Shepherd? I think I would tell a thousand black ones for you if they were needed.

But, Shepherd, you ought *never* to marry again. I am *sure* of that. You keep yourself free, and go ahead and be a bachelor scholar. You could get the best board in town for less than it has cost to run our house and me, and you would have no outside worries at all to take you away from your books. I know. I have asked about board. And then sometime you might go away to that Eastern university you talked so much about. It would be easier to do if you were a bachelor boarder and not a husband tied down to a wife and house and maybe children.

Well, we did have some good times together, did we not, Shepherd, while it lasted? I shall never forget our days in the woods by Abancourt Bayou, or our playtimes together in your great secret attic, our capture in the stable loft when you stood up for me, your camp-fire by the branch when I ran away from the sheriff and came back to you, your struggles with Julius Cæsar and our early housekeeping career, our first year here—oh, I shall have so *many* things to remember, Shepherd, when I have gone away.

And now I must close. They are waiting for me downtown. Will you not promise me, Shepherd, to go to bed every night by twelve o'clock and not sit up studying to all hours? You will make yourself sick again if you work *too* hard. And besides you will have more free time now.

I have sent your clothes and the house things to the laundry, and got in two lamb chops and a head of lettuce for your supper. They are in the ice-box. You will need some

butter to-morrow, but I forgot it while I was out. That striped blue shirt of yours was so worn out that I did not send it to the laundry again; I put it in the ragbag. There was simply nothing more that could be done for it.

I have sewed buttons on everything that had lost them, fixed up all your socks and put your clothes in pretty good shape, I believe. Do not forget to tell the milkman to leave just one quart of milk in the morning. If you let two come one will sour, and it will be a waste. You will need all your money, Shepherd. I am afraid I have wasted too much of it. The dress and the things for the ball are a waste after all, but when I bought them I did not think they would be. We have to take chances sometimes or we would not get much fun out of living.

And now I must request one more thing of you, Shepherd. You see what a bother a wife is. I could hardly bear to leave Marguerite, Gwendolyn and Arthur behind, but they could not stand the traveling I shall have to do. Their traveling days are over, bless their old hearts; *they* must be very quiet and still now. They have jolted along so many miles of country roads that their constitutions are considerably shaken, I am sure. Arthur's left leg is paralyzed already, Marguerite is losing her hair, Gwendolyn's stomach is not what it used to be, and she does not sleep at all well in the summer months. Tell Arthur to stop smoking so much. His face is getting right sallow, and he used to have such a good color.

Do you think I am laughing, Shepherd, as I write about the poor old dolls and their imaginary ailments? I assure you I am not. Pappy Dibble used to love them, I thought, almost as much as I did. I would sometimes catch him talking to them just as though they were alive, and he would blush and

get *so* nervous. And he would pretend to doctor them with his bitters and pick-me-ups. If you marry again in spite of everything, you could tell your wife that the old dolls belonged to the little sister you never saw. You showed me her grave under the cedars right near Pappy Dibble's grave.

But please keep Marguerite, Gwendolyn, and Arthur, and do not throw them away. They are so little—they are like me, Shepherd—and they would take up no room to speak of, and they would always be quiet, I am sure, so as not to disturb you. You will find them lying on the bed. I got them out to kiss them good-by. I was keeping them for some who were to come later, you remember. They will not come now. Just to please me, Shepherd, save my little children of the road.

Good-by, Shepherd. I cannot bear to write any more.

Yours affectionately,
PHOEBE.

· VII ·

Waiting in the Green Woods

Shep spent all summer traveling about searching for the mother of the little children of the road. He carried them in his valise wherever he went, meaning to use them in his behalf. All the money he had left he threw into the pursuit—what a waste! Phoebe would have said—and he would have mortgaged the house and farm, and sold his soul if possible for more money if he had believed it would do any good. He would have traded all the monkish centuries in history for so many minutes face to face with Phoebe.

He told Beddoes, Heydler, and Vallati everything —they were friends—and they helped him all they could, especially with advice calmer than any he could contrive for himself. Beddoes gave him two months, going with him over country roads in a buggy, stopping at every wagon-yard they could hear of, inquiring about itinerant medicine men, small theatrical companies, every group of caravan travelers that had women with them. Shep shrank from

the idea of putting the police on Phoebe's trail, as if she had committed a crime. Crime! He was the criminal, he thought, if there was one in that business. But finally he employed a private detective, who produced no better results than he.

He advertised in the personal columns of large newspapers in Texas, Louisiana, and near-by States. He devoted a week to writing an advertisement. He seemed to need a page to say a tenth of what he wanted to say. Beddoes ultimately did something that fitted the style and size of the personal columns: "Phoebe, come back. I need you. S.T."

And so he went home early in the autumn. Perhaps she would come after a while, or write. If she should see the advertisement, though he couldn't believe she would, she might go or write to Austin, but his three friends would let him know quickly if she did. He could not stay about the university. While he waited he wanted to bury himself deeper than he could there.

If by a miracle she should see the advertisement, he made himself believe she might drop in on him some day in the pine forest and say, lifting her chin and shaking her head: "Well, Shep, you asked me to come back. Here I am. Blood be on your own head."

For he thought he could find between the lines of her letter the idea which had most influenced her

in going away. A craving for the freedom of the road, boredom with her school work as a classmate of children, impatience with her progress as measured by memory tests, the chance meeting with some old wanderer that her father had known in his itinerant days, these and such as these had been involved in her decision; but probably the upsetting impulse came from a notion of hers that his way as a long-time student would be easier if she removed herself. People always think of men when they think of chivalry. It is a convention. Whenever the word crossed Shep in later years he always thought first of Phoebe, gallant little knight riding out into the world to serve her cloistered husband.

He had become again a hermit, going deeper into seclusion than before. Though the big house was ten miles from town, buried in a pine forest and screened by trees and shrubbery from a road along which not more than a dozen people passed on any day except the country's busy Saturday, yet it was now too public and glaring for him alone. When Phoebe was there he had loved the big house.

He wanted to live in the woods and to be close to running water, so that he could hear it all the time and feel its movement. Rain on the roof, the soft little whispering of the bayou among the cypress knees and fallen trees in the dim shadowed forest,

the gentle lift and swing of a boat on its slow current, these had always touched, and touched soothingly, something deep in him, and now he longed for them more than ever.

Going a mile into the woods behind the big house, he made a small clearing on the bank of Abancourt Bayou. Borrowing Hooker Dibble's wagon and team from Seneca Samson, who had bought the outfit, he hauled lumber from a mill twelve miles away to the bit of hard clay bank he had selected for building operations, and set to work on a house-boat.

It was good for him to use his hands, and he asked the help of no one. He camped in the woods until the hull was put together, caulked, pitched and slid into the bayou. Then he slept on it, among lumber, shavings, hardware, and tar-smelling oakum left over from the bottom of the boat. Within two months—he worked steadily but slowly, for he was in no hurry—the superstructure was up and the house-boat complete.

It was not large; a mere matter of two good-sized rooms, one for cooking and eating, the other for sleeping and reading; but it was large enough, and he settled down for a while. He smelled the earth and the rain and the woods, listened to the wind in the trees, lived over the days with Phoebe out here, watched birds and animals about their serious and

joyous little affairs, heard the low voice of the bayou saying only gentle things as it moved slowly on, felt its soft current rocking his boat, and regained some peace of mind.

And presently he began reading again. Not closely and with notes, as he had done at the university; now he simply drifted about in the Middle Ages searching for ardent interesting people to know. People were the bright points in history for him.

Beddoes and the two other good friends in Austin had volunteered to see that he got whatever books he wanted from the libraries in Austin, if they were available there. On Tuesdays and Fridays he walked over to the mail-box in front of the big house to wait for the rural rider who never came earlier than eleven in the morning, though Shep was there by ten in case the rider should some day beat his record. He was forever hoping that the amiable fellow would bring a letter from Phoebe. The rider brought plenty of reading matter about the Dark Ages, but autumn and winter and spring went by with nothing from the glowing Little Elizabethan.

Shep was haunted by the fear that she might come to the big house sometime, and not finding him there would go on away. That was a foolish far-fetched notion, considering the nature of Phoebe. If she wanted him, he told himself, she would find him;

she would search out and cross-examine Loretta and Seneca and everybody else anywhere near until she had the information she needed about him.

Nevertheless he persuaded Loretta and Pompey to move to a tenant-house out behind the enclosed vegetable garden of the big house. Their old fear of a ghost, mostly pretense even in the beginning for the sake of the thrills, had been weakened by the fact that Phoebe and he had lived in the house while he prepared for college. It wasn't strong enough now to frighten Loretta from an advantageous offer. He felt easier when she moved; if Phoebe should come somebody would be immediately at hand.

Old Tackaberry dropped in to see him occasionally, but only when he had been to Crebillon for a week-end of whiskey and Shakespearean declamation. At other times he was probably too lazy to walk the several miles required. That was why he carried an iron pot of cold cabbage or collards to school so often. He would cook a huge supply for supper in his cabin at night; his dinner the next day was thus already begun, needing only a pone of cold corn-bread, which he could take along in his coat pocket, usually the one he used for his pipe and tobacco.

From time to time Cesar Honfleur rushed out to see his maddening young ward, arriving with the

determined air of one prepared to fight something out and be done with it. But he would stay for only one meal, then dash away without fighting anything out.

Shep's Aunt Lyd, portly and ardent fisherwoman, came whenever she could find the time and a means of conveyance simultaneously. She would attend quietly to her fishing poles, study him sometimes when she thought he wasn't noticing, and, just before leaving, would ask if he had heard anything from Phoebe. Neither she nor his Cousin Cesar knew from him anything about Phoebe except that she had gone away.

The spring following her disappearance Mrs. Pilduff brought out for a few days an extremely pretty girl, whom she described as a fanatic fisherwoman. Giving them the boat, Shep camped on the bank a considerable distance away. This was a test of Mrs. Lydia Pilduff's, who was quietly satisfied with the result.

Loretta drifted over every Monday morning, swaggering her handsome hips and shoulders, her pleasant creamy face shining with the racy gossip she had been collecting and would presently place before him in the touching hope that she might entertain him. She did his washing, cooked his dinner and while he ate produced her shocking stories.

"Lawsy, Lawsy, it ain't *no* use; you ain't heard two words I said, Mr. Shep. Nobody been able to put life in you but Miss Phoebe. I pray the Lawd for another storm to blow her in our big gate. Books, books, nothin' *but* books, an' you is a grown man, an' the country is full of gals sweet an' willin'." To Loretta the primary and proper pleasure of man was to pursue women, and of woman to be pursued.

In May the head of the history department at the university, who knew from Beddoes that Shep was at home reading, wrote suggesting that he return the following October and take on his fellowship the coming session. He said he would continue the appointment anyway, and duly list him in the catalogue as part of the history faculty. If by any mischance Shep couldn't come for the next session no great harm would have been done by the appointment and the listing; if he could, the place would thus be open for him. There would be little teaching required, his chief diplomatically pointed out, knowing his man. Shep thanked him, but wrote that plans were necessarily unsettled and his return at any time soon doubtful.

One clear midday early in June the rural rider handed him, along with some books and papers, a letter from Phoebe. Dropping everything else to the ground, he leaned against the mail-box post and tore

open the envelope. It was postmarked St. Louis, had been sent to Austin and forwarded to him.

Dear Shepherd:

I should have liked to write often to you, especially if I could have had answers, only I thought maybe my letters might disturb you, and even if I did not give an address you might try to find me at the place stamped on the envelope. But now you are at the end of another session, with a world of good work already done, I am sure, and St. Louis is too far from Austin to think of coming here to catch me, even if you wanted to. Besides I shall be hundreds of miles away from it by the time you get this.

Well, I have a new job, a better one than I had at first, so now I can tell you what the first one was. Do you remember Pappy Dibble speaking of the professor and the two little red-headed banjo-picking girls we spent a week with in a wagon-yard when we were all storm-bound for a week? It was that Professor Hugo Williger who took me away from Austin. The two girls were as grown as I was, but they were still whanging on their old banjoes to draw the crowds. I was to dance, if you please. It was not much dancing, you can imagine, Shepherd, but Professor Williger said it would help pull the hicks to our automobile when we would stop in a place.

He had bought an automobile, a second-hand one, though it was as good as new, so the man said who sold it to him, and it could go twenty miles in a single hour.

Dear me, Pappy Dibble never knew what traveling was. We almost covered a state in the time he and I would have used to cover a county or a parish. Still I do not know if I liked it as well as I did our wagon and team. We saw more things in

the automobile in a day, but we did not see them so well. Everything and everybody was just a smear while we were traveling, and you cannot love a smear, can you, Shepherd?

I was with Professor Williger only two months though; and then the best piece of luck happened to me you ever heard of. My dancing was more comical than graceful, I suppose; or maybe I'm so homely and awkward it makes people laugh just to look at me. Anyway I was suddenly taken away from the medicine show to this new job, which is so much bigger it sets my head to swimming if I think of it by the side of what I was.

Well, I wanted to let you know I was getting along all right. I should like to know that you are in good health and contented peace, though you were sick only once in all the time we were together. I suppose your days now are full of serene quietness. I am sure you are successful in your work. I hope you go to bed by midnight, as I requested you to, and do not stay up to all hours burning yourself out. But I will wager you go to bed when you please, as you always did; and I suppose I would stay up too if I loved books as you do.

I do hope you have not married again. You will do better not to, I am sure. You will need entertainment sometimes, and women can help you about that. But do not go tying yourself to another one. I like to think of you in a nice boarding-house, maybe with one of those sweet old ladies near the university who have mothered so many students, and you with no work whatsoever to bother you except your university work.

I often lie awake at night after the show thinking of our times together, Shepherd. I come back to the big house then, and you and I play like children in the attic, and go out in the woods, and are caught by Cousin Cesar and the sheriff

in the loft again, and we go away to college and work and quarrel and go to shows, and are excited about our examinations, and so swelled up when we pass with good marks, and *everything*. And all that seems so long ago, Shepherd, so *terribly* long ago.

Tell Beddoes, Heydler, and Vallati that a tramp requests remembrance of them. If they ask who, tell them Elizabethan Phoebe, who does so like to remember them.

I wonder if you saved the things I wanted you to keep for me, but somehow I am sure you did. If you are not married again, Shepherd, put my ball dress on a hanger, hook it on a gas jet, and set my little golden slippers and my yellow silk stockings under it. Then you pretend I am there, and slip your arm around my waist and make believe we are dancing. Yes, do do that, Shepherd. Do it some Friday night at twelve o'clock, and maybe I shall know about it. Maybe you will even *feel* me in that darling dress, Shepherd.

It is a great deal to request of a tall grave scholar, but I wish you would lay Marguerite, Gwendolyn, and Arthur on your bed sometime, and kiss them and tell them that their vagabond mother is well and thinks of them often, and that they must always be very quiet and not make any noise to disturb you while you work.

You must not think, Shepherd, that I am discouraged, or homesick or anything like that. I assure you I am getting along splendidly.

Yours affectionately,
PHOEBE.

Shep was in St. Louis within thirty-six hours from the time he received the letter. He did not know

which way to turn, of course, or what he could possibly do. After a futile week he returned to the houseboat, leaving the little personal advertisement to run for a month in two St. Louis papers, newspapers that circulated far outside the city into several adjoining states.

Now he was more desperately hopeless than he had been since Phoebe's flight. Was there any use trying to catch her if she didn't want to be caught? It sometimes occurred to him, though he couldn't tolerate the thought for long, that he might have been entirely mistaken in his theory of why she had gone away; in which case it wasn't decently fair to pursue her and try to drag her back. He decided to sell the big house and the five hundred acres around it still belonging to him. He would accept the kindly offered fellowship, go back to Austin, continue his studies if he could, and wait. So he planned.

Cesar Honfleur, Crebillon's one realtor, threw himself at the job of selling the Tideboy place. If Shep should ever have the good luck to get Phoebe back again, he meant to keep moving about. He had a vague notion of studying medicine and taking to the road with her, as old Hooker had done, and going out every summer while he was studying too.

·VIII·

Strangers from Afar

CESAR HONFLEUR always walked as if leading a silver cornet band in full blast at the head of a gorgeous parade, and now after he had tied his old gray buggy horse to a swinging limb of a white oak tree he strutted toward the small railroad station on the edge of Crebillon, occasionally turning and walking backward to make sure that the ancient long-tailed Eugenie was not restive under the tree and to survey the two roads leading up the hill from the ancient little bayou town. He had the air of a drum-major whirling a gold-knobbed stick, followed by fluttering flags, swinging gonfalons and many proud feet.

But the faded red frame station, pushed a mile out in the country by Crebillon, which loved the memory of its steamboats and hated the rival railroad, was silent and without bustle of life. Several hardy train-gazers had walked up from town to see No. 5 rush in and rush out; they sat wordless and motionless on the baggage-truck listening for a faint romantic whistle far down in the deep pine woods.

Presently Lon Olds's cab would come rattling up the gentle hill in a cloud of yellow dust, rolling wildly on its weakened springs like a ship in a heavy sea. Old Lon would dash up, however, only at the last possible moment, his flat-toned black face calm and his movements deliberate and majestic as he lifted out the bags and suit-cases of his fares, if any. Catching trains gave him his high moments, few and not to be sacrificed for over-cautious passengers. Had Lon been there he would have been a fellow-spirit for Cesar Honfleur.

That restless person walked rapidly up and down the cindered platform, for sitting down was not to be thought of in his excitement. One of his far-flung advertisements had born fruit, and he was here to welcome the rare fruit, which was coming from such a thrilling distance.

He had been running a small notice in three weekly farm papers abroad, in England, Ireland, and France; not that he had had much confidence in them as business ventures, but they were inexpensive and they ministered to some need in his splendid heart. And now he had sold the big house and the plantation. The buyer, accompanied by his wife, was about to arrive, impossibly hailing from northern England.

Mr. Honfleur stopped for a moment to flap the dust off his shining thin-soled shoes with a vast cross-barred lawn handkerchief, lifting each little foot to the hub of the baggage-truck because he was too fat to reach the short distance to his toes; and he carefully adjusted the red signal rose in the lapel of his coat. It was to identify him to the new-comers.

As he began pacing back and forth again Shep strolled out of the station. Rushing at him, Mr. Honfleur seized his hand in both of his.

"Shepherd Tideboy, my tall infant! I did not expect this. It is marvelous, it is magnificent. My clients shall have a double welcome. But do they not deserve a grand welcome? They come across that broad Atlantic, across that Gulf of Mexico, up that Mississippi River, and then by train to this Crebillon. They have written me from New Orleans. We shall assuredly give them a welcome, you and I, Shep, such as their daring deserves. Oh, these English! They will go anywhere!

"But how is it, my cousin, that you are not on your way to that barbarous Texas city, to the university, to take up your so long delayed studies?" Cesar Honfleur flung Shep's hand away from him, and one might have thought, and been entirely in error, that he was furious with his tall young kinsman. Stick-

ing his thumbs into the armholes of his vest, he stood teetering back and forth on his heels, his black eyes lifted and fixed intently on Shep's face.

"Oh, the university doesn't open until October, Cousin Cesar, and it's only the beginning of September now."

"Do not tell me. I know. The wise student waits not until the last moment. There are many things to be done before the university opens. Have you looked about and selected a proper boarding place? Have you conferred with the head of your department and discovered exactly what are to be your duties as this fellow? Have you attended to all preliminaries whatsoever so that you may begin work on the first day free and clear? The answer is no, absolutely not."

"That's all right, Cousin Cesar; you needn't be alarmed. I'll be in plenty of time."

"Ha, 'plenty of time'! It exists not, plenty of time. You come to my office in the summer and say to me, 'Cousin Cesar, sell the old place if you can. I do not seem to like farming at all. It is running down, good land goes to waste, an active manager might do grand things with it. I will go back to the university to study, to teach a little now, maybe to become a professor in the end, if I do not at the last take up another profession. Therefore, sell the old place, Cousin Cesar.' You said that, did you not, my high

infant? I await your reply, but do not laugh. I observe twinkles in your gray eyes. But, yes, proceed to great laughter, if you can. It is years since you laughed, I believe."

"Well, yes, Cousin Cesar, I did say something like the things you quote me as saying; although I said nothing about becoming a professor, for instance. To be that I'd need to put in more years of study and teaching than I care to look at just now. But you have sold the place, and I'm grateful, and I'll be on my way in good time. Don't pretend to be surprised that I'm still here. You know I'd not go without coming by to tell you and Aunt Lyd good-by. You sold the big house and the five hundred acres, but you didn't sell the furniture and the other inside things. Maybe Mr. Denham will want to buy them, and—"

"But, my infant Shep, have you not yet sold those things? Why wait? You have had time sufficient for all that."

"Well, I thought Mr. Denham ought to have first chance as a buyer. He'd have to have furniture anyway. Besides, I'd rather like the old things to stay in the house just as they are. He's paid only half the price, something may go wrong, he may not stay on. You see what a slick business man I have become, Cousin Cesar. And then when he sees the place and

the country out our way he may not like it all out there."

"What then? Has he not signed papers and paid the money? He is bound. Do not soften, Shepherd Tideboy, and let him off. Make your heart of iron, like mine, and hold him to the bargain. I see you should have proceeded to that university and left all this to me."

"Well, and Mr. Denham and his wife will be rather lost away over here in the woods of Louisiana, I'm afraid, and I can show them around and explain things to them and make them better satisfied than if they were turned loose by themselves. Your relative, Cousin Cesar, is developing into a long-headed business man, isn't he? But you only want to lecture me, so go ahead."

"Assuredly, for do you not require constant lecturing? But attend, my infant; if he desires to buy those furnishings permit me to inscribe the bill of sale and make all things orderly, and to set the price. Ha, Lon Olds has arrived and now whistles the train. Proceed, my child, to that far distant end of the platform. I go swiftly to the rear. That is where the Pullmans are. Look for a man and a woman."

He went tripping far down below the platform. Presently No. 5 slid in, hissing like a monstrous

black gander. Four persons stepped from the train. Two of them were instantly seized by Mr. Honfleur, who swept off his great Panama hat, bowed twice as low as he could, shook hands, snatched up a suitcase and, with head still bared, led the captives forward almost on the run.

Shep was disturbed by the look of these would-be farmers. He had imagined a sturdy couple of obvious hard workers, bearing visible evidence of rural experience. Harry Denham was not finicky or delicate; he was of stocky medium height, broad-shouldered and robust enough, but Shep got the notion that he had never done any steadily difficult work in his life, especially not with his hands and not on a farm. He was clean-shaved, and his reddish-brown eyes were as merry as a boy's. He was obviously enjoying immensely the spectacle of Cesar Honfleur. Shep stiffened a little at that; he resented the smiles of this stranger at a kinsman.

Mrs. Denham was a girl of little more than twenty, he was sure; small, sturdy, with feet slightly turned in, black-eyed, rosy-cheeked, grim; and somewhat frightened, it occurred to him. She wore a blue sailor suit of a kind he had seen little girls wear, but never a woman, with a skirt much shorter than was common in those secretive days of the century's first years, and a blouse with a large collar having in its

four corners woven red anchors. He sometimes recalls with a shiver that he then appraised and rather dismissed Ida Denham as insignificant.

Cesar Honfleur introduced Shep with a grand flourish. The student volunteered to take the travelers immediately to the farm if they wanted to go, and soon they were in Hooker Dibble's old wagon, and the successful realtor, who had brought people from such a magnificent distance to buy land through him, was backing away from them, his hat over his heart, waving his free hand at the newcomers.

"Are there many like *him* around here?" asked Denham, and he asked it in a tone that mollified Shep.

"Just enough for flavor."

"I mean to see a lot of Monsieur Cesar Honfleur. He's precious. Isn't he, Ida?"

She drew down the corners of her mouth, shrugged her shoulders impatiently and looked away. Shep distinctly did not like this dour little self-centered person. He liked her even less during the trip; she had a way of impatiently snapping up the genial Hal and cutting him off in the middle of a sentence. She didn't respect her husband, it appeared to Shep. But Hal rattled on as if her sullen mood did not touch him.

Skirting the business section of Crebillon, the student drove on out into the country. There were two spring-seats on the wagon, he on the front one. When they had traveled a couple of miles Denham, telling his wife to lie down and take a nap on the second seat, crawled over and sat by Shep. He said he had a thousand questions to ask. She did not lie down; she sat erect, listening.

Shep seized the opportunity to warn Denham about the predominant black population in his end of the parish, and about the distance of the big house from white neighbors, so that he could withdraw if he wished and look for property in another section.

"Look here, my dear fellow," Denham said, catching hold of his arm. "I like you, and I'm going to call you Shep, as I heard Cesar Honfleur do. And you call me Hal, if you will. I'm older than you, but that doesn't matter. I'm thirty-seven."

"Be careful, Mr. Tideboy," broke in Mrs. Denham. "He'll have his arm around your neck in a minute."

"Never mind her, Shep; she'll get over it in time. About this farm of yours, the die is cast, the Rubicon is crossed and all that sort of thing. On that land we are going to try our great adventure. You'd be surprised, my tall infant, to quote the incom-

parable Cesar, if you knew how ignorant Europeans visualize America in this first moment or two of this twentieth century. They see it as vast uninhabited deserts, and trackless forests with the log cabin of a pioneer farmer every fifty miles or so, with New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia and only five or six other cities and a few raw new towns every two or three hundred miles.

"But look what we find. Only a night away is darkly ripe old New Orleans with the authentic flavor of Paris; only ten miles away is a town that can produce a Cesar Honfleur; and close to us in this green land are not savage Indians but amiable coöperative negroes, reasonably honest and only amusingly dishonest, according to your no doubt perfectly fair report. We have a house instead of a log cabin, and all the land I could possibly handle, at least for the present, for a very decent price. We're satisfied; we don't back out. The curtain's up, the play's begun, we shall see how it will all end. And you are not to worry, my tall infant, if you'll permit me to say so."

Shep thought he heard Mrs. Denham sniff, and he fancied he could see her mouth drawn down at the corners. Old Hooker's two horses jogged steadily on, the harness jingling, down the shady tunnel un-

der the trees, the road speckled here and there with sunlight; and an hour before dark he turned off the main road and drew up at his front-yard gate, the big house dimly visible back among its old trees. It was still summer and the deep yard was full of blossoming flowers.

"Here we are," he said, looking back at Mrs. Denham.

"Oh, is this really it, Mr. Tideboy?" Her face showed some interest now. "I do like it." She was a person of direct speech at any rate, he thought, and he wondered what sort of hut she had been visualizing.

Jumping down, he opened the gate in the picket fence, and stood waiting. As Harry Denham helped her to the ground Shep heard him whisper, "Our last chance, Ida."

Loretta, who was cooking a company dinner and luxuriating in the excitement of the occasion, welcomed the party at the front door, her handsome creamy face glowing with amiability. She had put the entire house in order, and Shep showed the Denhams over it at once. Mrs. Denham was more keenly interested than ever. He thought the sale of the furniture was assured, and he could see himself, this last item of business attended to, on his way back

to the university, there to live in the Middle Ages unless Phoebe should join him in a search for the high moments she loved in the present.

After supper the new owners and the student sat in the living-room talking, Hal asking questions eagerly about farming, Mrs. Denham silent but watchful. Shep had already begun calling him Hal; it came easily, he was irresistible. The student had explained that he was living in a house-boat a mile back in the woods, and after a while he rose to go. Hal said it couldn't be done. Shep was to stay on in the big house until the time came to go to Austin. Hal had employed Loretta on the spot as cook, and it was absurd for his new friend to think of getting up and cooking even his own breakfast. Besides, he said, he needed a native planter close to him. He declared he was absorbing valuable agricultural information at a prodigious rate.

Lying in bed that night young Tideboy could not help worrying about Hal and his wife. It was easily clear that neither of them knew the slightest thing about farming of any kind, or even about living in the country; and the husband had whispered to his wife, "Our last chance, Ida."

The kindly young man had put supplies in the big house for a week, so that the new farmers might get settled before having to attend to the gross de-

tails of food; and after a few days Hal chartered Pompey and his wagon to make a trip to town for groceries and a dozen other things that he wanted. He said he would look around for a wagon and team of his own, and investigate the matter of stocking the place with thoroughbred hogs, chickens, and goats. He was doubtful about the commercial value of goats, but he said they appealed to him; he must have a few around. He also wanted to learn the road and get acquainted with the merchants in town; he relied on Cesar Honfleur to give him a good send-off there.

Shep seized this first day on which he was free of the rôle of instructor to go to his house-boat. He planned to begin packing up his things to carry with him to Austin, and he had to consider what to do about the house-boat while he was away. This was the only home he could call his own now; he must take care of it. If Phoebe should come back—well, she would enjoy the lark of life on a house-boat for a while; after that they'd move around. He was undecided whether to roll it up on the bank, or to leave it in the water, with Seneca Samson, who spent much time hunting in the woods anyway, to look after it if the bayou should rise in a rampaging flood.

He put in the day there, returning to the big house late in the afternoon to have supper, talk to Hal and

sleep. Mrs. Denham waited for her husband until long after dark; then she and Shep ate, in silence.

The early part of the night was warm, and they went to the front porch to listen for the coming of the wagon. She sat six feet away from him, rocking nervously in her chair. She was obviously worried, and he was surprised. He suggested that Pomp was slow but reliable, and that Hal had no doubt decided to do a great deal in town in the first flush of his farming ardor.

She made no reply. Huge bull-bats darted about in the dimness, an owl hooted so near they could hear the throaty gurgle at the end of his hoot. Mrs. Denham was wearing a thin cotton house dress, the air had begun chilling an hour after sundown, and stepping into the hall he lifted off a hook a shaggy smoky-smelling tweed coat of hers and brought it to her, holding it up for her to rise and slip into. Taking it out of his hands, she put it on herself and sat down again, saying nothing.

Along about nine o'clock they heard a man singing far down the road. Leaping up, she ran out to the gate, dashed down to the road and pressed on in the direction of the voice, Shep close behind her. The singer might not be Hal, he thought.

But it was. They met the wagon a few hundred yards down the road. It was piled high with goods.

Hal was on the spring-seat bellowing with hilarious glee, slapping old Pomp on the shoulder from time to time by way of emphasis. Mrs. Denham stepped back among the trees and let the wagon pass unchallenged. Shep stood by her. They followed behind it, in the deep sand, neither speaking, Hal continuing his loud song of a kind that would have appealed to Loretta. His wife bent her bare head and drew the coat closer around her.

When Pomp stopped his team in front of the little gate in the picket fence Shep walked up to the wagon. Mrs. Denham went on into the house.

"Hello, my tall infant, is that you? I saw Cesar Honfleur in town to-day. I love him like a brother; he's better than I dared think. We're going to do a lot of business together. We'll make this old place out here hum before we're through."

Putting his foot on the side of the wagon, he jumped heavily to the ground, striking himself on the metal tire of the wheel as he came down. Shep had heard a smothered tinkle of glass as he hit himself, now the keen odor of alcohol spread out around them. "Don't you like to smell the stuff, Shep? It's the most glorious smell in the world." Leaning on the tall student's shoulder, he ran on about his magnificent plans for the plantation. Shep called up to Pomp to drive through the big gate and unload the

wagon on the kitchen porch. He knew the old negro would be sober, he was mortally afraid of Loretta.

"Mr. Shep, he shore is *one* caution, he is."

"Hold on, Great Pompey," shouted Hal. "There's something very important in the wagon I must have before you go."

Pompey knew what that was. He handed it down into outstretched hands.

Helping the unsteady husband into the house, Shep maneuvered him into the bedroom behind the living-room and persuaded him to lie down on his stomach; he must not sit down with a hip pocket full of broken glass. Pulling off Hal's trousers, he found him another pair, and then assisted him to the dining-room. The traveler said he had had no supper and was as hungry as ten bears. Mrs. Denham did not appear.

"Where's Ida?" he asked, looking up at Loretta. "Well, never mind; I know. Poor girl! Yes, and poor me! She'll give me her devilish silent-contempt treatment for a month now."

He had held to his tall quart bottle. It stood on the table by the side of his plate. Pouring out half a tumbler of red whisky, he drank it down without a grimace. Shep had tried to steal the bottle, but Hal had been too concentrated on it to permit that. He had shown the first glimpse of ill humor the

student had seen in him. "Shep, don't be a damned goody-goody!"

Back in the living-room before a small fire he held forth about his plans. Cesar Honfleur was going to divert as many new farmers as he could to this corner of the parish. Hal was to build a grist mill, a cotton gin, and ultimately a store. The way to make money, he whispered confidentially, was not so much to farm yourself as to sell things to farmers—groceries, hardware, dry goods and so on—and to lend them money. There wasn't, he stated, a gin or a store or a corn-meal mill in this end of the parish. Cesar Honfleur had given Shep the same kind of enthusiastic talk often; he recognized some of his positive kinsman's phrases. And it was all true enough too, he knew.

After a while Mrs. Denham came in quietly and sat down on the side of the hearth opposite Hal. Shep was between them. In a small armless hand-made oak chair that his Granny Jeanne had used when she wanted to sew, Mrs. Denham rocked herself jerkily back and forth with quick nervous movements, staring into the fire and then at the face of her husband. He talked on and on about his increasingly splendid plans, and as he spread himself her black eyes blazed, a faint furious sneer showed on her face, and her hands kept twisting and twisting

about in her lap as if she would like to use them somehow on the speaker.

She said nothing whatever, but after she came in his voice grew louder and more belligerently argumentative. He was carrying on a violent debate with an opponent who infuriated him without uttering a word. From time to time he drank from his bottle.

Sometime after eleven Mrs. Denham got angrily to her feet, and striding into the adjoining bedroom returned with two blankets and a suit of pajamas. Dropping them on the old horsehair sofa, she announced to the air, "I'm off to bed, Hal. You'll sleep in here to-night." She disappeared into the bedroom, slamming the door behind her.

Shep heard the key turn in the lock. So did Hal. "Old girl is taking it hard, Shep." He closed his left eye in a villainous wink and bowed his head two or three times. They heard her shut and lock the door leading into the main hall and the other one opening upon the back porch.

Hal's belligerency of argument softened now. He drank oftener. The bottle was nearly empty. Between twelve and one, Hal having drunk himself at last into drowsiness, Shep spread the blankets on the sofa and left him, going to his bedroom upstairs above the living-room, that chamber wherein the ambitious boy had battled with Julius Cæsar.

Crawling into bed, discouraged and worried, he began thinking as usual of Phoebe, where she might be and what that new job of hers was. The moon had come up late; now the world outside his windows was pale and white. He listened to the gentle September wind in the pines and the faint rattling of the big stiff magnolia leaves. The damp air was rich with flowers and vast fields of slowly browning grass. He tried to think about his own plans, but his mind kept coming back to that disturbing pair downstairs. He said they were none of his business, and tried to go to sleep, and could not.

He heard the tall clock in the old-fashioned shut-up parlor on the other side of the hall downstairs strike one. He got up, put on socks and slippers and a bathrobe, and sat by a window smoking his pipe.

Presently he heard Hal's voice calling in the living-room below him. Then the drunken husband began beating on a door; presumably with his fists, the blows were not sharp and shattering. It was the door to Mrs. Denham's bedroom. Shep tiptoed out into the upstairs hall. This distinctly was *not* his affair. He went back and sat down.

Then the blows downstairs became loud and shattering. Hal was evidently battering now with something hard and heavy. Young Tideboy loved the old

house, it hurt him to sit still and hear it being smashed at. Mrs. Denham, if she were still in the bedroom, must be in terror now for all her grim defiance of the past few hours. But there were two other doors, he said to himself, through which she could escape if she wanted to.

He heard the instrument Hal was using break through a panel of the door, and he thought he could see him reach his hand through to turn the key in the lock. He went down the stairs as fast as he could in the dark, the hall doors being closed, and into the living-room. It was flooded with moonlight from its four great windows.

Thinking that in his befuddlement Hal would not turn the key in the right direction because he was working at the lock from the wrong side of the door, he ran down the hall first to make sure Mrs. Denham had escaped, or should now escape if she wished to some temporary hiding place. Hal had craftily tied a rope from the knob to a stout hook on the wall. Shep went to the door opening out on the back porch. She was trying to get out that way, but here Hal had tied another rope from the knob of the dining-room door to her door opposite. She could open it only an inch or two.

The knot was all the harder for the desperate pulling she had been doing, and Shep's knife was

in his clothes upstairs. He called to her to let the door alone so he could untie the rope.

He set to work on the knot. Presently he heard Hal's voice just inside, then sounds of a struggle, Mrs. Denham crying and begging. The knot loosened, came open and he flung back the door. A white figure dashed by him, and he threw his arms around Hal as he started after her.

"Get out o' this, Shep! None o' your affair."

Shep thought if he could hold him for a few moments she could hide herself. He couldn't hold him. Hal was fighting mad, and though unsteady on his feet furiously strong. He broke loose and ran along the kitchen porch. The tall student caught him again, and turning Hal sent a terrific fist at his jaw. Shep bent aside, it caught him on the neck. Hal was loose again, but before he could move Shep grappled him. They strained and struggled all over the light-flooded porch, upsetting a tin wash-tub with a clattering bang and knocking down to the ground some of the boxes Pompey had unloaded from the wagon.

Once while Hal lay on the floor, his arms pinned under pressing knees, he gasped out, "Damn it, Shep, keep out o' this, I tell you. None o' your confounded business. She's my wife, isn't she? The sulky little cat thinks kittens o' mine would be born

drunk and stay drunk all their lives. Let me up, I tell you." He flung himself sidewise, and was free again, instantly on his feet.

It was impossible to hold him. He was now trying to knock Shep out, and the frightened boy—he was only twenty-four, and felt much less in his inexperience—thought this mad middle-aged man might easily do it within the next few moments. Hal was not trying to get away now; he was coming at his enemy. Shep gave ground, then crouched. Cold lightning flashed up and down his back, his head swam for a second, he seemed to see a red flash, his ears clicked, and he drove at Hal as hard as he could. His fist felt as if it had been broken. Hal's head had snapped back at the blow, and now he was crumpling. Shep caught him and eased him to the floor.

Shep thought he might come to within a minute or two, and they would start it all over again unless he prevented that happening. Running to the dining-room door, he untied the rope there and bound Hal's hands and feet. Then he carried and dragged him back to the living-room and lifted him to the sofa. As he lighted a lamp Hal began cursing him lustily. He tied a gaily figured table-cloth over the shouting mouth and went in search of Mrs. Denham.

She had run out barefooted and in a thin night-

gown. The early morning hours were positively cold. He was shivering himself though he was covered with a thick bathrobe. He darted about the back-yard calling her, not too loudly because he didn't want to arouse Loretta, whose house was a hundred yards behind the vegetable garden. He feared the work of her lively imagination if she got on the trail of this night's business.

The big house sits high on its red brick pillars. He thought Mrs. Denham might have gone under it and hidden in a chimney corner. He prowled about under there calling her name. Then he went on to the great front yard, darkened by the tall trees, thick with bushes of pomegranate, Cape jasmine, and roses that had run wild again since Phoebe and he went away to Austin. Seeing something white pushed back under a pomegranate bush, he stooped down and put aside the limbs. Mrs. Denham was crouched back as far as she could, sitting on her heels, her chin on her knees, her black hair falling all about her.

"Come on in, Mrs. Denham. I had to tie up Hal with ropes for the rest of the night. He can't move or speak until I let him do it, and I'll not let him free until he's sober. Stand up, Mrs. Denham, please; you've *got* to come inside, you know. You can't possible stay out here. Come."

She shook her head, but made no other movement. Reaching down he picked her up and carried her into the house. It occurred to him that she was heavier than Phoebe, and he was surprised. She was no taller, he told himself; she must be more firmly fleshed and more filled in. She lay quietly in his arms.

He bore her into a room behind the parlor, laid her on the foot of the bed, pulled down the covers, moved her into place and drew the covers up to her chin.

"You're cold, Mrs. Denham; I felt you shivering. Keep covered up. Don't worry. I'll sit up with Hal the rest of the night. He'll be all right by morning. *Will* you stay in this bed, Mrs. Denham?"

"Yes."

"Well, good night."

He opened the windows and started out. She called him back and he walked to the side of the bed. Reaching out, she caught his hand, held it to her breast, then pushed it suddenly and violently away.

He went back to guard Hal, who was sound asleep. Shep covered him up warmly, removed the gag, and getting down a blanket from the room above he wrapped himself in it and lay down on the rug before the hearth.

· IX ·

The Vagabond Farmer

PERHAPS the worried young Shep slept a little, but he was wide-awake when dawn began filtering in from the east. Far to the north a rooster crowed, and out in the chinaberry tree behind the big house two others raised their voices at the same time. In the room darkness and light were white and black powders sifting and sifting together to make a gray powder, which was coming brighter every moment.

He sat up and looked at Hal. That broad face, stubbled with reddish whiskers, smeared with some black substance, lay back against a cushioned end of the sofa, calm in deep sleep. It was an open, engaging countenance, and Shep couldn't help smiling forgivingly at him, for all his wild doings of the night before.

Glancing at the fireplace to see if any live coals might be left, he noticed what Hal had used to break through that door last night and what had blackened his hands and by way of them his face. He had snatched up one of the andirons in his fury,

later flinging it back among the ashes. It lay upside down. Shep hoped it hadn't been hot, though the small wood fire had probably burned low by one o'clock.

It was still chilly, but the tired and worried watcher did not feel up to making a fire. The sun would warm things presently anyway. Soon he would have to untie Hal, and he did not know what would follow then. Possibly another fight, only this time the broad-shouldered man would be sober.

His own hands, he saw, were smudged from the contest of the night before. Tiptoeing upstairs, he washed and shaved and dressed, and came down again to await the event. The room was fully lighted now. Mrs. Denham sat stiffly erect in the little oak rocking chair, staring at the dead gray ashes of last night's fire. She wore that dark blue sailor suit Shep had noticed when she stepped off the train in Crebillon, with the little red anchors on the wide collar of the blouse.

She did not turn her head when he came in, or speak. Hal's reddish brown eyes were open, and his large mouth greeted Shep with an amiable grin. That worried young man cut the ropes from Hal's wrists and ankles, and stood anxiously back. Hal lifted his hands above his head, yawned luxuriously, and lay back down. There was certainly, Shep said

happily to himself, to be no more fighting between Hal and him that day.

"Feel all right?" he asked.

"Rotten, Shep."

"It had to be done, Hal. I'm sorry."

"Oh, I know. There was nothing else for *you* to do. When I refer to you again as my tall infant I'll mean it in a new way from now on. I was fuddled enough, but I remember the terrible thing that happened to my jaw. But I bear you no grudge, my tall straight-nosed infant."

"Better get up, and wash your face," his wife called without turning to look at him. "Your face is as dirty as a sweep's. Loretta will be here soon to start breakfast. I hear her now. I'll go help her."

"All right, Ida; I'll clean up." She did not stop to hear him. As he approached the bedroom he halted and pointed at it. "Good God, Shep, did I do all that? It was a beautiful old door."

Shep walked down to the stable, wandered out across the field where Hal and Pomp had been clearing the land of shrub pines and sassafras bushes, and came back for breakfast, which was a strained and silent meal. Saying he would knock off ax-work for half a day, Hal led Shep down to the house-boat. They sat in the bedroom-library, and Shep lit his pipe. Hal did not smoke.

"Shep," he began, bending forward and looking at him earnestly, "you've seen part of our family skeleton; you might as well see the whole thing. Besides, I know much more about you than you know about me, so you're entitled to information. We're still friends, I hope."

"So do I, Hal."

"Shep, once there was an English boy whose father happened to be rich. The old gentleman manufactured bicycles by the thousands, and at that time bicycles were all the rage, over there at any rate. The boy's older brother was taken into the full partnership with his father, and ambitious plans were made to build the younger son into a professional man, into an architect, because he could draw a little and because his babyhood blockhouses had been considered evidence of architectural genius. Parents otherwise sane and level-headed are often simple-minded about their children.

"The boy had the best of grounding—private tutoring, public school, Cambridge; then came Paris and the Beaux Arts. He was quietly pushed out of Cambridge before the end of his scheduled time there, and he didn't finish the training for architecture in Paris. You know why, now.

"Well, he wandered about over France, Italy, and Germany, pretending to study architecture, wasting

his father's excellent bicycle money, getting into all manner of devilment, often locked up with lousy tramps as dirty and worthless as he was.

"Ultimately his allowance was cut off and he was compelled to go home. He hung about the town of the bicycle factory, making a mess of his time. In the eyes of his family he there added a masterly final touch to his disgraceful career: the rich manufacturer's son ran away with and married the daughter of a Scotch draper, proprietor of a little hole-in-the-wall shop. But the prodigal came back home, bringing his wife with him. He said he would work in his father's factory as a day laborer. His promises as to toil weren't taken seriously.

"Before I married, bicycles were already beginning to lose their vogue. My father's nerves were worn to a frazzle by his business; he refused to transform his factory for other uses, saying he would stick by bicycles. He was like that. My failure as a student for a profession, my sometimes shabby doings while wandering over Europe, and then finally my marriage settled me in the opinion of the family, all of them. I was a black sheep beyond hope.

"Englishmen like to send their black sheep out of sight, far out of sight. They will go to considerable expense to remove a black sheep, and they will give him, it must be said, a generous last chance, if only

he will keep away. That's why this place of yours was bought for me. It was but half paid for because it was thought that thus I might be stimulated to work to pay off the balance.

"In addition, I have a hundred pounds or so to get the farm started, and I'll receive a small monthly remittance so long as my father lives. That can't be so very long now. It is understood, indeed agreed, that I shall appear in my father's will for no more than a shilling, because of what has lately been done for me. Ida's people *couldn't* help her if they would; and then that grim family rates her as black a sheep as I am.

"Well, we're a pair of black sheep, Shep, and this is our last chance. Hence our great plans for the future. Therefore Ida's indignation at my breaking of a pledge that was to be utterly sacred, this time, over here. Therefore my penitence this morning. On the rebound from sin, Shep, I become virtuous; humility and candor are the manifestations of this state, which is also, in its way, intoxicating. I get a great kick out of penitence.

"These manifestations are disarming and engaging, Shep. I have sometimes deliberately set them to work in my behalf. People are generously impelled to believe and say, 'A man can't be bad who confesses like that.' They're wrong; he can be, on

occasion, as honest and frank as a child and still remain thoroughly rotten.

"I have a pretty clear notion that I'm a bad egg. Don't you be misled, Shep; keep a sharp eye on me. I owe you half the price of the farm and house. I owe you for the furniture and furnishings. I'll probably owe you for anything else that you happen to want to sell. Watch me, Shep, or I'll get you some day. To-morrow I'll no doubt be sorry I opened up to-day. I'll call myself a damned fool, and begin saying things laughingly to undermine what I have just told you. Watch me, my tall infant. I like you."

"All right, Hal; I'll watch you. I'm protected well enough. Now what I'd like to know is how long these spasms of yours last. I've got to go away from here two weeks from now. Your wife is a stranger in this country, with few white neighbors near-by. If you keep your damnable party going a long time you'll probably be staying away from home soon."

"Yes, I didn't want to come last night. But old Pomp, driving from one saloon to another by my order, would slip inside and stand behind me, holding his hat in his hand and looking so solemn and sad and frightened that finally I couldn't disappoint him. Besides, the last place I was in had no one to drink with me. In the early stages I love companionship."

"Well, are you through now, Hal, or are you one of these people who go on for weeks? Remember, your wife is marooned here in the woods. I'll be around for a couple of weeks, but after that—"

"Shep, I have sometimes stayed drunk for months; not always dead drunk of course, but never quite sober while the spasm, as you call it, was on. But in those days of course I could get money by cabling the governor. Sometimes I can get over it very quickly. I am done with this one now, I am sure. No, I won't say 'sure'; I'll say I *think* I am. And I *think* this is the last one. Good-by, Shep, I'm going for a five-mile tramp. No, don't come with me; I want to be with myself. It won't be pleasant, but it will do me good, I believe."

"So long, Hal, don't get lost in these woods."

"I'll go over to the road."

Shep began his leisurely packing. Hal would be on his feet again by night. The side-tracked student took out the deep tray of his larger trunk. That tray was reserved for Phoebe's things that he was to save. He set to work tying books in bundles and stacking them in the bottom of the trunk. Presently he heard or felt, with the woodsman's sixth sense, someone among the trees on the bank of the bayou. Looking out, he saw Mrs. Denham coming toward the boat with the quick driving strides characteris-

tic of her and that always seemed to him, then, masculine and strangely inappropriate for her small person. She wore tan boots laced high up on her legs and a wide-brimmed brown hat. Hal had confessed, grinning, that he and she had bought for the wilderness considerable equipment suggested by Buffalo Bill's circus.

Opening the door he moved outside, in case she should simply want to ask about her husband. She came on across the gang-plank from the shore, and walked inside without greeting. He was accustomed to her manner by this time. Following her in, he closed the door. She was looking through the window on the bayou side of the boat.

"Where is Hal?" She did not turn around.

"He's gone for a long tramp. He's got hold of himself again, Mrs. Denham, and I'm sure he'll be all right now."

"He's been confessing, I suppose. Telling everything? He's a great confessor."

"Well, he's not blustering and swaggering about as if he were proud of himself, Mrs. Denham, and that's something."

"Oh, I know. He has his splendid moments; and then come hours—hours and days and months and years. But you'll like him; everybody does. You're already calling him Hal as if you had known him

all your life. Within a month or two everybody in town will be calling him that too. They'll like him no matter what he does. And then men stand by each other."

Picking up a stack of books, he began tying a string around them. She wheeled around suddenly.

"Why didn't you say you stood by me last night? I expected *that*." She spoke as if she were furious. One end of the string was in his mouth, his hands were occupied with the heavy books, and he hadn't anything that he wanted to say to that anyway.

Moving to the tray of the trunk on the floor, she looked down at Phoebe's little children of the road, each wrapped with tissue paper, lying side by side, faintly visible through the thin wrapping. In the larger section of the tray were the dress and slippers and the rest of Phoebe's commencement outfit, also in tissue covering. Mrs. Denham glanced at them, but she fixed her eyes on the dimly seen Marguerite, Gwendolyn and Arthur.

"Dolls! Mr. Tideboy!" She stared at him, her black eyes wide open.

"They were my wife's when she was a girl. I'm saving them." He wanted to cover them up. They were between Phoebe and him only. He resented this outsider looking at and asking about them. Surely

she knew something about Phoebe; Loretta had no doubt given her all the gossip available.

"Did you love her like that, Shep—as your voice sounds?" She dropped on her knees by the tray and reached over to take up one of the dolls. "May I unwrap it? It's so long since I've played with them."

"If you don't mind, Mrs. Denham, I'd rather you wouldn't."

Getting to her feet, she strode out of the door without a word. He covered the tray with the tablecloth, in case anyone else should come in. It occurred to him that she had called him, for the first time, Shep; certainly a slip of the tongue, probably due to the fact, he told himself, that she had heard Hal use the name so often. He plunged into the job of making ready for his flight to Austin.

Hal did not appear for midday dinner. As Shep learned later, he did go to the road to walk, for fear of losing himself in the woods, but when a wagon came by on its way to town he hopped into it on impulse. By so doing he provided the student with a good deal of wholesome exercise all the rest of that day and far into the night. Having hunted Hal in the woods until sundown, he rode to town, leading a horse in case he should find the lost settler. He did locate him easily enough—Crebillon

had only six saloons for three thousand people—but Hal refused to come home then.

By the end of the week, however, the reveler had straightened himself out, had flung himself at the shrub pines and sassafras bushes once more, and the student left for Austin the last day of September.

Hal insisted upon seeing him off at the station with a great flourish. He treated the tall student as if he were a younger brother of whom he was extravagantly fond and proud. He begged Shep to come back for the Christmas holidays. Mrs. Denham had hardly touched his hand as he left the big house. She was back inside before he had gone halfway down the steps.

Waiting for the train, the student and the settler walked back and forth arm in arm on the cindered platform. "Shep," said Hal, "I envy you. Don't let *anything* get you off the track again. I can't help knowing something of your affairs. You need your study, now if never before; it'll be the saving of you. Go back to it, and stick to it. To be young and a student with a straight road ahead of you! Yes, I envy you, Shep. Stick to it, and don't let anything get you off the track."

· X ·

A Gorgeous Scandal

Shep did not return to the big house for Christmas. Beddoes, Heydler, Vallati, and he rented the same little four-room cottage in which Phoebe and he had found so many high moments, and some not so high. They employed a combined housekeeper and cook, who lived outside because it was a tight enough squeeze for the four teaching Fellows in the small house. Shep stayed with these friends over the holidays.

He settled down easily into his agreeable rut as a student specializing in history, and of course specializing more intensely on the Middle Ages. His teaching duties were light beyond his fondest expectations. Probably forty-eight hours for the entire college year covered the work of that kind he was called on to do; the senior instructors had abnormally good health and only a few out-of-town dates. But he worked on examination papers, did chores for the department, and was expected to produce, in time, a paper, possibly a book, on some his-

torical subject. He was gathering material on the medieval student in Paris—that wild adventurous figure come in out of forest and walled town, sometimes protected by king or church or both, often damned and harried by all the powers that were, endlessly fighting, arguing, loving, digging out of the dark bits of Greek beauty and Arabian science.

So the session passed, and pleasantly. There was not now the zest that was in everything when Phoebe was with him, to make much of his scholastic triumphs and to double all their mutual pleasures. Existence was calm and easy but prosy, with little or no tension. So far as he could see, he could go sliding along his quiet rut for years. He actually paid his way with the salary coming from the fellowship, and he was asked to go on with it the following year, hope being held out of further promotion in the not too distant future.

At the end of the session his three comrades at last went on their separate ways, further westward: Heydler to Arizona, Vallati to Utah, Beddoes to California. They were all to keep their eyes open for the Little Elizabethan. Shep could see himself the next session installed with one of those lovable college mothers about whom she had written.

He went home, to his house-boat, for the summer vacation. During the year Cesar Honfleur had writ-

ten him glowingly of Hal's energy and boldness. The new planter had put a second mortgage on the property, snapped up an old cotton gin and grist mill at a bargain price, moved and set them up. He had built a general country store on the road several hundred yards below the big house, had stocked the farm with horses, cows, fowls, hogs, and even goats —not many but all thoroughbred—bought a full equipment of the best farming tools obtainable, and was "proceeding," Mr. Honfleur had said, "full steam ahead, absolutely, yes." Four new tenants were on the land in addition to Pompey and Seneca, so that six farmers would be paying him a share of their crops in the autumn.

Shep's Aunt Lyd had written that Hal had captured Crebillon and the entire surrounding parish. Everybody called him Hal, and he could be elected to almost any office he wanted. Mrs. Pilduff was always interested in politics, her language having a political flavor long before woman suffrage came.

The leisurely old town hadn't seen such driving energy in years as Hal's, she had reported. He was a demon for speed. Most farmers liked to drive in, wander around among the merchants, talking and smoking and not unwilling to accept a drink, getting out of town late in the afternoon or the next morning. Not so with Hal in these days. Pompey attended

to all the slow heavy hauling; when Hal went to town he entered in a gallop on a big bay horse, rushed about the streets still in the saddle, giving his time solely to business affairs, loitering nowhere, drinking nothing, genially amiable to everybody, making new friends constantly.

Mrs. Denham must be satisfied with her husband, at last, Shep thought. The Denhams' last chance looked to be a good chance now. Though Hal had gone rather deeply in debt, it seemed certain to the student that he could come clear and establish himself solidly within four or five years, if he kept up the pace he was going. By that time he could have accumulated some capital to lend or to buy more land with.

Yes, to the solicitous Shep, the prospect then seemed fair for all of them—the Denhams out of danger, he back in Austin in the coming October drifting easily on the current of the Middle Ages, wishing for the little Elizabethan but no longer feeling the hurt of her absence so constantly.

And yet, stepping aside and looking back at himself, as he often does, he sees a tall spectacled young man, twenty-six years old, dressed in a dark striped cotton shirt and those queer pinkish jeans trousers that happened, he believes, only in the South, and seldom even there now, going about the plantation

with long strides, springing up quickly on his toes at each step in that odd way of his; and it is November and the university has been open a month.

He rises at daybreak on his house-boat, cooks his own breakfast, goes to the big house, feeds the stock in the stable and devotes himself to the multitudinous duties of a working planter. Cotton ginning is still going at full blast, and he rushes down to the mill-shed below the store to make sure the negro in charge of the leaky, eternally fizzing boiler has a good head of steam up.

He will be in and about the gin all day. It is run by negroes who know how, but they need and appreciate superintendence and encouragement.

Besides, there is freshly picked cotton to be weighed, and the ginners' toll of seed and lint must be taken out of every lot of it. Ginning has been going on two months, and he sees already a sizable pile of cotton bales stacked under a shed—toll from the gin—to be sold when he thinks best. The little boiler will fizz and the old engine will creak and groan for sometime yet before the season is over. Cesar Honfleur was right as to the relative ease of making a bale of cotton from a gin as compared with raising it out of the ground.

Early on Saturday the whistle will begin shrieking, sending a message three or four miles into the

silent surrounding country, saying that corn will be ground that day. A superfluous message, for corn is always ground there now on Saturdays. Men and women, boys and girls will drive up with bags of newly shelled corn, usually slung across a horse behind the saddle. The long-legged young man with the big-pupiled gray eyes will measure the corn, and when it has gone in between the two ridged grinding stones he will measure the meal to the waiting patrons, keeping out the accustomed toll. This he will sell in the store to improvident folk who have failed to shell their corn for grinding or who haven't any to shell.

By noon his clothes, tow hair, eyebrows, and thin-skinned fair face will be white with the flying flour from the mill. Smelling deliciously of freshly ground corn, he will hurry to the big house for midday dinner. Loretta will be cheerful and full of jolly humor and many a broad joke at the expense of this farmer or that, but Mrs. Denham will sit gloomy and wordless, often staring before her.

By three o'clock the grinding will be over for the week. It is a simple process. There is no sifting and bolting. Everything is in the meal that was in the corn, including a few careless cobs.

After the mill stops he will go to the small, rough-boarded, unpainted store, already beginning

to weather toward a soft gray color. He will sort the mail, which now comes on Wednesdays and Saturdays. This end of the parish has a post-office at last, named Ida by a merry-minded husband not unwilling, on occasion, to make his wife furious. Mrs. Denham will have been there during the day, selling people what they ask for, herself grim, forbidding, savage. She will hurry out when he comes in. It sometimes occurs to him that her seeming hatred of work in the store is strange, since she is keenly interested in its profits and is constantly asking shrewd questions as to his conduct of it.

On most week-days the store is closed. If customers come they bang a stick or stone on a worn-out plowshare hanging on a limb of the red-oak tree in front of the store, and the tall young man, who is usually within call, appears and attends to the matter in hand. Occasionally he may have to be away, in town to shop or to get a hair cut, or far out in the fields; then Mrs. Denham will rush down to the store and put through the transaction with a frenzied speed.

It is, in detail, picayunish business more often than not: a dozen eggs to be traded for a spool of thread, a beady-eyed hen for a yard of calico, a cash purchase of a paper of needles, a bottle of chill tonic, a gallon of coal-oil. But sometimes the

customer is a buyer of importance. And anyway, the solemn tall young man in the hickory shirt tells Mrs. Denham, a little reprovingly, the store costs nothing to run, it returns a generous profit on what is sold and a considerable profit in the aggregate; and since it has been built and set going it might as well be kept going as well as possible. It is absurd not to be cheerful about it.

And at such reproofs she sniffs and turns her head away. But after all she probably sacrifices little business, he says to himself after these scenes of awkward censure. Most of the buyers are negroes, patient and forgiving beyond belief to white people, especially to this fiery little woman with the great black eyes, the pink cheeks and the snowy throat.

At the end of the day he will have supper at the big house, and rising from the table will proceed directly to his house-boat on Abancourt Bayou. He may read a little, but usually he is too tired to read a great deal. He will smoke prodigiously, stand outside on the bow looking up at the gay little stars dodging about among the branches of the cypress trees, listening to the eternal wind in the pines of the near-by hillside, and to the bayou, inky black against its shallow bottom of leaf mold, unhur-

ried but with its ultimate goal nothing less than the Mississippi and the Gulf of Mexico. And then he goes to bed.

Here then is that husband for whom the gallant Little Elizabethan rode out into the world, rode away meaning thus to help him toward becoming a scholar of fair repute; at least so he tells himself repeatedly and furiously. And he is what? He is not a Fellow in the faculty of history, as he is listed in the catalogue; he is a kind of volunteer manager without pay of a plantation which he would not manage for himself when it belonged to him, and managing it not badly.

Is there anything that can be said for his recent management of his own life? Well, let's go back to June, when he arrives from the university. He has settled himself in the house-boat for a quiet summer rich with reading when, in July, a theatrical troupe comes to Crebillon. It is billed for one night and "East Lynne." It stays a week because it has no immediate dates ahead and is about to give up the ghost anyway.

Happening to be in town the day it arrives, Hal stays over to see the show; on impulse surely, and probably also because his first farming ardor has worn itself out. He has been indulging in no fri-

volity for months. During the following week he startles, scandalizes, and immensely entertains Crebillon's citizenry.

The small town has in stock not more than fifty bottles of champagne, some of it necessarily very old. Hal calls it all out for a post-midnight supper at the Franco-American Hotel to the theatrical troupe. By day he dashes about the sandy streets and out along the country roads in a shiny new livery-stable buggy behind two white horses, by his side the hopeless star of the dying company, a young, slightly stout, and extraordinarily attractive woman, no doubt grateful for any anodyne of amusement and utterly careless of public opinion. By night Hal makes the members of the Climax Repertoire Company forget that its end is fast approaching. It is easy to believe that in his genial, one-sided generosity that is what he is trying to do.

Nothing and nobody can stop him. He sweeps Cesar Honfleur aside and laughs at his violently splendid rebukes. He pays not the slightest attention to anything the long-legged student has to say. "Brother Shep," he says, "get back to your monkish books."

Passing along the street one day with his white horses and Millie Pancoast, he sees Mrs. Lydia Pilduff. He bows to that portly pedestrian lady and

swings off his wide-brimmed black felt hat with a gesture worthy of the magnificent Cesar himself. Mrs. Pilduff shakes her fist wrathfully at him, and he bows again, smiling; whereupon she grins and waves her hand at him.

She suggests to Shep that Hal's wife be brought to town to confront, halt, and seize him, but at this suggestion Mrs. Denham merely sniffs, contracts her nose, draws down her mouth and walks away.

It is generally agreed in town that Hal should be locked up for the good of the community if not for himself, but officers of the law disappear down alleys when he comes rampaging into sight. He is a disgrace and a superb divertisement; Crebillon already loves him, it judges him indulgently.

When the heavy-eyed Millie, her engaging open face very much worried, and the Climax Repertoire Company move uncertainly on Hal follows them for ten days, then disappears.

So much for the July sensation. The plantation must go on. Considering the store, mill, gin, and half-dozen tenants, it is a sizable plant in operation. It is heavily in debt, it must continue operating. It is at a critical moment. No one is in sight to take charge except the monkish student on vacation. He will do it, he tells himself, through the summer, and then employ a manager if, by any mischance, Hal

doesn't come back by the time the university opens.

Hal does not return. The tall worried young man in hickory shirt and pinkish jeans trousers brings forward in September, one after another, three promising candidates for manager, to be approved by Mrs. Denham. After all, it is her property, in the absence of her husband. So he tells himself. She ignores all three candidates without troubling to explain why. A thorough spanking would do her good, the monk of Abancourt Bayou decides, but then he defends her to himself on the ground that she has ample cause to be irritatingly unreasonable.

Cotton ginning has begun with a rush early in the autumn. It will continue at a rush until Christmas. What money is to be made out of the gin must be made quickly. October comes, and the desperate student writes to Austin that he can't return, that he is needed at home. Hal will come home presently, he says to himself; then he will drop back into his agreeable university rut. Not again with his fellowship of course, that will have to be filled at once; but after all he doesn't need the three hundred dollars a year. And then without a fellowship he will have more free time for study.

One day leads into another, the job is continuous, self-perpetuating, more interesting than he has thought it could be, for him; and here he is, in

November, on his boat, dead tired, lying in bed, rocked by the bayou, slipping off to sleep, thinking of two lovable vagabonds, one his friend, the other his wife.

Christmas comes and goes—a silent holiday for the big house but for the spirited and irrepressible Loretta—and ginning is about over. Cotton has brought a rather good price, the gin has produced a small mountain of bales as toll, the six tenants have turned over to the volunteer manager another large lot, and early in January he takes up one of the notes held by a Crebillon financier against Hal. Why let the money remain in the bank when it can wipe out a note costing a good deal to carry?

He presents the cancelled note in triumph to Mrs. Denham. She looks at it closely, holds it a few moments in her hand, gives it back to him without comment. What a celebration, he thinks ruefully, the Little Elizabethan would have made over that piece of paper under like circumstances!

Hal left a zero balance in the bank when he followed the Climax Repertoire Company out of Crebillon. At the great agricultural settling-up time in the autumn checks amounting to something over seven hundred dollars have been paid in at the store for supplies sold on credit to reliable farmers during the year. These checks have been deposited

necessarily in Hal's name, the bills against the store having been paid out of funds gathered by the student manager. That seven hundred dollars has not of course been drawn against to help lift the note. It is pleasant to think of it as an unanticipated nest egg for the penitent when he shall come home and settle down to work again.

Late in January the volunteer manager discovers that the nest egg has been checked out, through a bank in Georgia, on paper authentically signed by the runaway farmer. For several days the monk of Abancourt Bayou thinks he would like to be at the loose end of a rope tied around the neck of an amiable vagabond. But there is no point in worrying Mrs. Denham about it.

What of her during these puzzling days? Is she merely sitting about moping, doing next to nothing? No, she is up early every day flaming about the house and yards. There is plenty for her to do. Loretta attends to the cooking, milking and churning. Seneca's wife Airy does the washing. Everything else Mrs. Denham takes on herself. Loretta and Airy must be looked after. There is now a large collection of fowls to be shepherded. In the warm months there are many flowers to be watched over and cultivated. And she gets through with a great

deal of sewing, all of her own and surely some for Loretta and Airy.

Passing through the big house, the side-tracked student often sees her sitting on the old horsehair sofa, her legs crossed underneath her like a tailor's, her white forehead puckered between thick black eyebrows, her thimble clicking rapidly and her needle flashing through the cloth. At other times she will be bent over his Granny Jeanne's ancient sewing machine making it rumble and roar and almost snort.

When she first came to the big house she occasionally made a shopping trip to town, dropped in on Mrs. Pilduff, whom she liked immensely, visited some of the too few white neighbors in answer to tentative calls from them, and attended the Methodist Church four miles to the west, where a preacher holds forth once a month, and where Sunday-school and one of those exciting rural functions called a singing happens every week. But after Millie Pancoast, she withdrew herself as much as possible from outside contacts, going nowhere, and became more of a hermit than her volunteer manager, who is now compelled to get out a good deal among people.

Old Tackaberry comes now and then to dinner, and to hint for news about his beloved Hal and to

talk about Robert Burns, with the notion that all Scotch people know every line of the poet and cannot be restrained from talking about him so long as there is a listener. He is disappointed in this Scotch woman in that respect, but he drops in from time to time, eats dinner enormously and spends the afternoon on the house-boat. Mrs. Pilduff comes occasionally, ostensibly to fish, probably to reconnoiter also.

Often when her volunteer manager is in the store on dull week-days Mrs. Denham rushes in to get a piece of cloth, a spool of thread, or something else to work with. At these times she is either amazingly and strainedly gay or dismally gloomy. Sometimes, pretending to be a colored customer, she will drift slowly up to the counter, sit on a stool and ask with a slow smile, "Does you all keep any onbleached domestic, Mr. Tideboy?"

And she will feel it thoughtfully between thumb and forefinger, rolling her black eyes, double a corner of it into a tight lump and then straighten it out and scrutinize it, and try to take the bolt to the front door of the windowless store to look at it in a better light. But Mr. Tideboy will carry it for her, because it is heavy, and they will put their heads together over it, he eloquent as to its quality, she doubtful and hesitating.

In these light moods she will cautiously steal a stick of candy from a jar and give him a piece of it; or sneak a bottle of Hoyt's German cologne from a showcase, dampen the front of her dress with it and coming close to him will tiptoe and ask him to bend down and smell how sweet she is. At such times he thinks her not unlike the Little Elizabethan, but he never tells her so. Possibly he is afraid she will ask questions. Sometimes he wonders at his silence as to Phoebe in Ida's presence.

He has fallen into the habit of thinking of her as Ida. Probably because Loretta calls her Miss Ida; at least that is how he explains the matter to himself, defensively. After one of her visits to the store in a jolly mood he will sit a long time in a chair propped back against a counter, recalling images of her, the rank odor of the cologne still pervasive in the dark shack, mixed with the conglomerate smells of coffee, coal-oil, dry goods, and molasses fermenting and slightly alcoholic.

But more often than not she is the opposite of light-hearted when she strides into the store. Then she will rush behind a counter, pushing him aside if he happens to be in the way, get what she wants and hurry out again without saying a word.

Cesar Honfleur, the violently respectable realtor of Crebillon, will now and then take Shep aside in

town, ask him how in the devil all this is to end, hint that people are already talking—he has heard two innuendoes the week before—and beg him to be careful about what he is doing. "Consider the lady's name, my infant."

The long-legged student no longer stands in awe of Cesar's adult wisdom; he is, he feels, something of an adult himself now. He smiles at his violent relative's evidences of alarm, attributing the manifestation to that worthy's flair for the dramatic and colorful. There *must* be a manager at the plantation. Why not he as well as another? He lives a mile away from the big house. A manager could hardly live further away than that. So he says, and Mr. Honfleur snorts.

But he is more impressed by Mrs. Pilduff's guarded inquiries. She worries him by her obvious restraint, and he studies what might be done under the circumstances. One day at the end of February, bracing himself for the interview, he warns Mrs. Denham at the dinner table that he would like to have a talk with her on the front porch after Loretta has cleared up and gone home.

Mrs. Denham being busy immediately after dinner, he sits on the porch smoking and waiting for her, very nervous. Out in the orchard to his left the peach trees are flaming into pink and the apples and

pears into a passionate white. The front yard flowers are opening themselves to the warm sun, and bees from the half dozen hives in the back yard are storming over them, hungry for their fresh sweetness after the recent lean time in their cold winter quarters.

She comes with a handful of sewing and sits in a chair close to him. She is relatively amiable today. "What is it, Shep?" And, biting the thread with her teeth, she raises her black eyes to his, smiling invitingly. She almost never addresses him directly by name. This softly spoken "Shep" makes his talk extremely difficult. She wants to be friendly now, he tells himself ruefully, and he will probably have to hurt her by appearing in the rôle of uninvited interfering adviser.

He winds and winds around the subject in his mind. Has she heard from Hal? He knows she hasn't, but he asks the question to gain time. Has the possibility occurred to her that Hal might not return, at least not for a long time? Has she considered that it might be better, under the circumstances, if she went home, back to England, back to her own people? If Hal should appear, penitent, he would be told where she was, and he would send for her, or, more likely, go flying after her. There are ample funds in the bank to finance the trip. So

he says, resolved to get the money somewhere if she will use it.

Her head is bent low over her sewing. The thimble clicks and the bright shaft of the needle plunges through and through the dark cloth she has in hand. She prefers dark-toned stuffs for herself, summer and winter; possibly because they set off the marvelous satiny whiteness of her skin. So he thinks at the moment, looking at her.

Drawing a deep breath, he goes on. If for any reason she doesn't care to return to England, she might go to Crebillon to live until Hal's return. The farm is doing well enough to support her there. She could board with some agreeable family, or even stay at a hotel, just as she wishes. In town she would have plenty of company, friendly women on all sides, entertainment, churches around the corner, music, freedom from many trifling vexations. And it might be for only a short time anyway.

Well, has she thought about it at all? He has been hesitant about speaking, since he might seem a presumptuous meddler. However, he has felt he ought at least to mention the matter, as she might not have realized how well the plantation is doing and how far she could depend upon it. And at last he is through with the unpleasant duty.

He rises and knocks the ashes out of his pipe on

the edge of the porch, stoops there to scrape the bowl laboriously with his knife, peers into the bowl time after time, and sits down again, waiting. He fills the pipe, strikes a match, then glances over the flame of it at her.

Her hands are dead in her lap, her black eyes fixed on some point out in front of her, her full breast struggles heavingly up and down. Suddenly she stands up, the scissors and thimble and sewing materials sliding clattering to the floor unheeded; then with a swishing of her skirts she rushes into the house. He follows the sounds of her hard-hitting little heels, he hears her step in the living-room just behind him.

He slowly picks up the cloth and scissors and thread and drops them on the seat of her chair. He walks to the steps, drifts down them and finds after a while the runaway thimble, and returning sits down. A pair of pigeons are at the far end of the porch bowing and cooing, their tiny coral claws audibly scratching the floor as they walk, so still is the tense world around. Absent-mindedly he fits the thimble on his little finger, pushes it down, takes it off, pushes it down again and again.

The French windows opening from the living-room stand ajar. Presently he hears her in there convulsively crying, catching her breath in gulps,

moaning and writhing like a frantic animal. Giving away to emotion, even for a clearly compelling cause, is almost unknown in her, to him; he is shaken, and his ears click and his eyes blur, as they always do when blood rushes to his head.

Laying the thimble on the pile of sewing, he walks quickly to a window, hesitates with his hand on it, and then turning goes through the long hall and out across the fields, into the woods and at last to his boat. Drawing aside a curtain hanging over a corner of his bedroom, he stands in front of Phoebe's little yellow ball dress, suspended on a beribboned hanger above the gilt slippers. He can feel her inside the dress, see her lifted chin and her jolly blue eyes, framed in the lacy black mantilla.

If Ida—if Mrs. Denham will not go away, he will go himself, by gannies. Yes, and at the end of the crop year, already well begun and not lightly to be sacrificed; he will cut out for Austin and the Middle Ages. The plantation may then go to the devil for all he cares.

· XI ·

Feast of the Hoboes

For three days Mrs. Denham does not appear in the dining-room when the volunteer manager is there. She has eaten already, Loretta reports with a ready wink, or will eat later, or doesn't care for anything at all. And then she comes again to the table, grimly, and all goes on as before. It is not her way to explain, apologize, or argue. The subject he has opened on the front porch is, so far as she is concerned, closed.

One Monday in March—he remembers it as Monday because he is in these times most determined and energetic on the first day of each week—he rises and eats before sun-up, harnesses a horse and drives off to the thirty-acre field he has set aside for his own cultivation. It is good to hold straight the plow jerking at his arms, to feel his animal answer the lines so certainly and easily, to tread the soft freshly broken ground beneath his feet. The field is full of satisfying earthy smells, the little green corn leaves, still so tender and weak, wave bravely

in the light wind, and the ruddy sun comes riding in from the radiant east.

No fever is out here. The sliding plowshare playfully throws a double ripple of dirt over worries, smothering them as if they were sprouting weedy grass. Black crows rise up and go slowly flapping away, scolding without rancor, and he smiles at their philosophic calmness. This is as peaceful and pleasant as the Middle Ages, and much more healthy.

Three miles south of the farm runs a railroad, going west to Texas and east to Mississippi. Where it crosses Abancourt Bayou is a water-tank, at which passenger trains seldom stop and freight trains often. In the still forest he can hear them going on their way with a low roar. All things traveling into the romantic distance remind him of Phoebe, and from time to time he stops the plow to stand and follow a train as it lifts above the horizon of sound a tiny sibilant whisper, rises to a dim thunder and slips away into the deep silence.

The morning passes too quickly for him, and at the dinner table he is full of high spirits. In the afternoon, arriving at the end of a furrow, he sees Mrs. Denham sitting in a corner of the rail fence, some six feet away from the plowed ground. He doesn't notice her until he is turning the horse. Her legs are crossed under her, she rests her bare head

against the ancient oak rails, colored gray and worn smooth by the years, and her white hands are holding a shining needle and a ball of fine thread. As if to say, "See, I'm working too," she lifts them up, her face lighted with one of her rare still smiles, seeping out slowly from some inner source of canny merriment.

"Who's watching out for the store?" he asks.

"Oh, bother the store! I gave Loretta the key. She can attend to anybody that comes, if any do come. It isn't likely to-day, in the middle of the afternoon. She knows the prices of most things. If she gets in trouble she'll blow the horn."

Then she bends her head and goes on with her crocheting, her red lips pouting. He thinks how different Phoebe would be. She would have come running across the field halloing to make him notice her approach, and she would now be asking quick questions just to make talk, frolicking with the horse, criticizing him gaily or complimenting him enthusiastically on the crookedness or the straightness of his furrow.

He goes plowing up another long row. Coming back, he keeps lifting his eyes to see the little figure there in the fence corner, a dark spot against the gray rails. He clucks often at the horse and shakes the plow lines, so that his return trip is achieved

much more swiftly than his up-trip. But she says nothing when he comes back, only lifting her pink and white face and faintly smiling. After a dozen rows she sociably moves to another fence corner to be in line with the scene of his operations.

The plowing is going much faster now, the horse is blowing and looking back occasionally with rolling eyes as if to ask what the new hurry is. The wind is still, the green corn leaves stand straight, the sun is hot on the back of the plowman's neck. Presently Mrs. Denham awaits him on her feet.

"Teach me to plow." She smiles, probably to soften the brusqueness of her words. He turns the horse, sets the plow in the ground, places her hands properly on the handles, and holding it with his left hand and the lines in his right he clucks at the horse. A dozen feet of corn is promptly dug up.

Getting behind her, he puts the lines over his head, reaches his arms around her, holds her hands on the handles and speaks to the horse. This is better, for the corn. The plow runs true, and she glances up into his eyes triumphantly. His arms tingle where they touch her, and he smells her hair.

At the far end of the furrow, screened by fences and thickets of plum bushes, the horse halted awaiting the signal pull of the line for the turning, she says softly, "That was fine, let's do it again." She

leans back against him, lifts his hands and holds them against her breasts, and tiptoeing raises her face, her lips parted. He bends his head, but the sudden excited blowing of the horn up at the big house brings him straight and listening. The horn goes on with quick sharp calls.

"Loretta must be in a lot of trouble," he says. Unhitching the traces, he ties the horse to the fence and starts across the field. He begins running, and Mrs. Denham calls to him. "Don't leave me, Shep." Holding her warm hand, he goes on again. At the cross fences he leaps over first and receives her in his arms; and goes running on, holding her hand closely in his. He sees Loretta charging down the gentle slope of land from the big house, waving her arms. And then they meet, the usually well-poised colored woman now wildly excited, showing the whites of her eyes.

"Tramps, Mr. Shep! I seen 'em around the big house, an' then they went on down to the store. I heard 'em breakin' open the door. I was afraid to follow 'em there, an' Pomp is in the field. A big crowd, Mr. Shep; I don't know how many—maybe ten, maybe twenty. You better grab a gun at the big house before you go to that store."

Telling Loretta to take the plow horse home, and Mrs. Denham to go on to the big house, he races

on, his head full of fury at all promiscuous vagabonds.

It is a short cut to make directly for the store. As he nears it he can see that the back door is open. Arriving at the steps, he can see through the store: the front door has been unbolted from the inside and flung wide.

The place is indeed full of fuzzy tramps, sitting about at their ease on chairs, boxes and counters, talking at a great rate, eating crackers and canned sardines and salmon. The store reeks with a fishy oily smell, rising even above the usual conglomerate odor.

"Hello, my tall infant! I didn't think you'd be here; that is, to tell the truth, I hoped you would be, if anybody was. I'd come to shake hands, Brother Shep, but my two fists are full of cheese and crackers. Meet my friends and accomplices!"

A bareheaded, auburn-bearded, stout figure on a counter thus yells at him as he stands in the back door, considering where to begin.

"This is the 'Frisco Kid,' " Hal goes on, pointing at a bleary-eyed old sinner gorging sardines and looking to be considerably more than a kid. "That is Topeka Tim, this lily-fingered youth eating so daintily is Poughkeepsie Pete—oh, Shep, they're too damned numerous and alliterative to mention. This

is just a little snack, we're hungry. We'll have supper later."

"Hello, Hal; did you come from town?" This is somewhat lame, but it is the best the volunteer manager can do.

"No, we left our private car, 'The Tomato Can,' at the water-tank on Abancourt Bayou, and walked through the woods here."

The side-tracked student has nothing further to say. He stands at the back door surveying ruefully the disorderly mess already made by the ragged visitors.

"Now don't worry, Shep. You look as solemn as an owl. You always would worry too much. Cheerio! Let it go. Forget it. Got to stand by my pals, you know. Where's your Southern hospitality we've heard so much about? But never mind, Shep; this lousy lot of beggars will pass on after a few days of good eating and sleep. Where's Ida?"

"Up at the house, I suppose."

By habit he moves forward and shakes the hand of the smiling Hal; and by habit he walks behind the chief counter.

"Don't look at the cash drawer, Shep; I've robbed it. I need the money. It's mine anyway, unless I'm mistaken. And I must also have a good many remittances here to cash."

"Yes, I think you have. Your wife will tell you about them."

"But, my tall chivalric infant, what the devil are you doing here in March? I thought you'd go back to Austin last October. Have you foreclosed the mortgage? No, no, Shep, I didn't mean that. I know very well you've been carrying on while I've been going to the devil. I think I expected you to. But I warned you, remember."

The volunteer manager's ears click, he sees red, chills run up and down his back. He stalks out of the store.

Passing the big house, he tells the excitedly loud Loretta and the still, tense, little woman with her on the back porch who the tramps are and who their host is. Mrs. Denham strides into the house. He goes wandering across the field in the direction of his boat, but half-way there he turns and comes back, and hangs around the big house and the store the rest of the afternoon.

Hal is busy as host. He leads his company—there are ten shambling scratching wanderers besides himself—to the well in the back yard, where they copiously dilute the fish and crackers they have eaten. Leaving them sitting on the floor of the back porch, their legs hanging over and kicking, their mouths puffing store cigars, he starts inside to

pay his respects to his wife. Before he gets away the wheezing, ancient "Frisco Kid," cocking one eye up at him, calls to him.

"Bring out the missus, Happy, an' lets see her. We heard you when you were drunk in Vicksburg braggin' about what a handsome Jane she was. We'll all be glad to meet her."

"Never mind that, you perfumed old polecat. She isn't for the likes of you to meet."

" 'Scuse, Hoose! My mistake! So sorry!"

To these new and admiring friends his name is either "Happy" or "Hoosegow Hal," the latter because he is reputed to consider a vagabond's short term in jail as something in the nature of a lark.

What passes between the returned prodigal and that grim, truculent little Scotchwoman the monk of Abancourt Bayou never knows. But presently Hal comes out again, unsubdued, indeed more loudly and belligerently amiable to his guests than before, which conduct is probably meant as a demonstration of some kind to his wife.

He commandeers a half-grown negro boy, son of one of the new tenants, sends him hurrying off in a buggy to Crebillon with money and an order for four gallons of whisky. Then he grandly summons Loretta to hear his wishes as to the supper to be prepared for the company. He sits among his com-

rades on the back porch. She approaches on the ground, her white-clothed head on a level with his feet, wearing her own grand manner as a shield and a decoration.

"Hello, Loretta."

"Evenin', Mr. Denham."

"What's the matter with you? You used to call me 'Mr. Hal.' "

Loretta pats her right foot on the hard grassless ground, and looks away, her tongue visibly in her left cheek.

"Loretta, I want a chicken supper. We've had a little snack to stay our stomachs, but we're hungry. I've been telling the boys about your cooking. They're all set for something special, very special, Loretta. Build the supper around roast chicken—seven or eight of them will be needed, at least—with a pot of rice, a bushel or two of hot brown biscuit, plenty of butter and buttermilk, preserves, jellies, and the like. I'll leave the rest to you. It will take some time, of course. We've ample time; we're rich with time. We can wait until nine o'clock if necessary."

"Yes, an' you can wait until nine o'clock next month if you 'spect me to cook for that crumby gang of hoboes you got there. I'm through."

And she stalks across the yard in the direction of

her house, her head held high, swishing her skirt defiantly.

"All right, we'll do for ourselves then." Hal is now noisy and blustering, without good humor. "The women, it appears, don't like our looks, boys. We'll manage for ourselves. We know how, don't we, 'Frisco'?"

"Shore do."

"Up and at 'em then."

If this were the previous Friday the coop behind the store would be full of chickens taken in trade, but Pompey has carried them to Crebillon on Saturday and sold them there. Presently the buxom Plymouth Rocks in the stable-yard are dashing about squawking, pursued by extraordinarily nimble tramps.

A rectangular pit is dug in the back yard, a fire built in it, and ten big chickens are laid on a grating of tongs, iron shovel handles and other metal rods hurriedly collected by Hal. The long pine table is dragged out of the kitchen and set under an oak tree near-by. A huge board box of crackers is brought up from the store, along with cans of tomatoes, peaches, and other fruit, plus a box of biting cigars. Between eight and nine o'clock the negro boy returns from Crebillon with the whisky, and the orgy begins.

The night is dark, the table illuminated with a coal-oil lamp in the middle of it, throwing in high relief the faces of the eleven bearded vagabonds. Mrs. Denham and Loretta are not in sight. Four or five negro men are hanging around on the outskirts of the party, grinning and occasionally accepting a tumbler of whisky, or a chicken leg flung by the prodigal Hal. The monk of the Middle Ages sits on the kitchen porch, forty feet away, invisible, wretched, surveying the scene.

Peace and quiet and freedom from all worry, Phoebe meant to give him them when she rode away. A scholar of fair repute! Look what a mess! Bending his head, he clinches his long fingers in his hair. Good God, where is all this to end? This king of tramps is also the owner in full title to everything here.

Is he to sit still and see the old place, dearer than ever because he has lately been working so pridefully with it—is he to sit still and see it ravaged and befouled by these filthy parasites? He shudders to think what his tall, dignified father and his neat, finicky, finely-grained little grandmother would feel if they were witnesses of this orgy by this rabble. And how far will it all go? Hal has plenty of money from the cash-drawer, and Crebillon has plenty of whisky.

The guests have till now been somewhat self-conscious and timid. Hal rallies them for their quietness and backwardness. "Damn it, make yourselves at home, you lousy water tanks!" The tumblers are filled and emptied and banged on the bare table. Knives and forks rattle, and sometimes a plate or dish is broken, whereupon the diners yell and joke the breaker.

The old tramp who in the afternoon has asked to have the missus brought out repeats his suggestion, emboldened by his liquor. Now Hal doesn't resent the request. Leaping up, he dashes into the unlighted house, the monkish student close on his heels but keeping out of sight. Maybe Mrs. Denham has successfully hidden herself. Perhaps she is at Loretta's. So at least he hopes.

Hal storms through the rooms shouting, "Ida, Ida! Where the devil are you? Come on down. Don't be so damned stuck-up."

He is lighting matches and throwing them still burning to the floor. He comes finally to the attic door, and it is locked. He begins beating on it bawling his wife's name.

"Stop it, Hal! She's not in there. I saw her going out across the field. She's probably hidden in some negro tenant's house, to escape her husband's gang."

"The hell she has! She's in here. Get out o' this, Shep. I know you though I can't see you. I thought you'd be trailing along."

"Cut it out, Hal. It can't be done."

"Why not, my tall infant? Why not?"

"You know why. I'll not stand by and let you drag her down among that gang."

There is a moment of tense stillness on the tiny dark landing in front of the attic door. Then there is, luckily, a sudden burst of shouting down in the yard, and the befuddled Hal, diverted, rushes away to see what all the extra noise is about. One of the diners, giving up, has slid under the table. Mrs. Denham is forgotten. For how long? The desperate, furious, wretched seeker after peace and quiet stays around.

Was Mrs. Denham hidden in the attic? He doesn't know. When Hal ran away he hurriedly knocked at the door, calling out questions to her. She didn't answer. It would be like her to stick to the house in silent truculent defiance. He goes back now to the attic door. It is unlocked. She is probably somewhere in the house yet, but he can't find her. He goes back to be near the bawling, banging revelers. There is no telling what they might do now.

He keeps out of sight. More negroes have come

in to the light and the sounds of revelry, from the tenant-houses and from the road. Five or six are drinking with the tramps, and as drunk as they. Standing about in a wide circle are other black people, looking on, shouting, laughing disdainfully, enjoying the exciting spectacle, especially as it marks for them the fall of white men. That tickles some deep racial vanity and jealousy of the blacks, hidden always in the South except for flashing moments like this.

Hal orders a great fire built in the middle of the yard, merely to look at evidently. Deserting the table, he leads his staggering band to the porch. They sit on the edge of it, singing, bellowing words without meaning, telling dirty stories, watching the leaping red flames. Three prostrate diners lie under the table.

An hour or so after midnight the fire dies down, the clamor dies down, the onlooking negroes slip away. Several more of the guests are asleep, lying back on the porch floor.

"Get to bed, you jail rats!" Hal claps his hands to attract attention. "You're too filthy to sleep in beds. I'll take you to the stable loft. You'll find plenty of fodder there for bedding. Pick up the dead ones and follow me. The picnic's just begun,

boys; there's more to come to-morrow and to-morrow."

Holding the lamp, he unsteadily leads his guests to the stable. The three unconscious diners are hauled up the ladder with difficulty. But he gets them there ultimately, warns them almost tearfully, in his sudden drunken attack of emotion, against striking matches and burning their precious selves alive, bids them a sad farewell, as if he is to leave them for a long journey, and climbs down the ladder.

Still holding high the lamp, he goes tiptoeing into the house. With elaborate and futile efforts against noise he steals blunderingly through the rooms downstairs, through all those on the second floor and slips on up the attic stairs. Now the door is unlocked, and he prowls about in there, mumbling and bowing his head up and down very wisely.

But the fire of his vitality has also died down. Soon he returns to the living-room, sets the lamp on the table, lays his body on the horsehair sofa and is asleep almost instantly.

Presently a tall, distracted young man in striped hickory shirt and pinkish jeans trousers slips into the room. He stares at Hal a moment, blows out the light and sits in a chair by the fireplace, his head in his hands. From time to time during the rest of the

night he goes out to the stable, walks around it and listens; then he steals back to the living-room. When daylight comes a silent white-faced woman with wide gray rings around her eyes sits on the side of the hearth opposite him.

· XII ·

By the Window a Vision

THE tramp party goes on from Monday until Saturday, Hal in varying degrees of drunkenness all the time, his wife dodging about day and night in the big house and sometimes at Loretta's eluding him. How and when she eats Shep doesn't know. Probably she steals into the kitchen and snatches something whenever the ribald company is down at the store or ranging about in the fields.

Loretta comes to milk the two cows twice a day, but as to cooking she has struck; after this is all over, she tells the volunteer manager, if it ever is, she will go on as before. The wretched monk strayed out of the Middle Ages does for himself at his houseboat, and hangs around, often rallied by the host for his solemn face.

"Cheerio, Brother Shep! The worst is yet to come."

But Hal is mistaken as to that; nothing worse comes, or could. So thinks Shep Tideboy. On Tuesday the company, including Hal, rising about noon, have a gay time cleaning up. Having cooked their

midday breakfast in the kitchen, they commandeer several pairs of scissors from the store and cut each other's hair. The back porch is a shambles of slaughtered grimy grizzled locks.

Then Hal presents to each guest a razor from the store, thus entirely cleaning out the stock of that article. A coöperative shaving bee follows. It is surprising, thinks Shep, how young some of the tramps appear when their faces are fully revealed, and there is despite the obvious viciousness of an occasional countenance a certain adventurousness and humor apparent in all their hard faces.

After the shaving and hair cutting the company proceeds to the bayou, with soap and towels provided by the host, and there is a further renovation. The store is calmly seized as a commissary by the tramps, who help themselves to socks, coarse cotton shirts, trousers, shoes, bandana handkerchiefs, mouth-organs, perfume that shouts, and anything else that strikes their fancy.

On Wednesday Hal, wearing a fresh outfit of clothes from the big house, and looking fatter and more robust than ever, goes to town in the buggy to cash his accumulated remittance orders, which he has found without assistance from Mrs. Denham, and to bring back a load of bread, cigars, and whisky.

The halted wanderers rise late each morning, eat a noon breakfast, play cards and skylark down at the store, drift around the fields, and then every night have an orgy and a gorge at their festal table in the back yard under the oak tree. All the chickens and other fowl, two pigs and a young goat are ultimately barbecued over the pit dug the first day. Farm work is at a standstill, and the store supplies only the needs and whims of the guests. Negroes from the surrounding country crowd in every night to stare and laugh, some of them sharing in the free suppers and the free whisky.

The volunteer manager commits murder in his heart a dozen times a day, and sticks around, looking as gloomy as Hal says he looks; desperate, silent, feeling himself a poltroon and yet not seeing what he can do, but more determined than ever to get back to Austin and his peaceful studies of the Middle Ages. At the end of the crop year he will go, he thunders at himself; sooner unless this nonsense stops, and if Mrs. Denham can only be persuaded to return home or live in Crebillon. He catches glimpses of her from time to time, a flaming figure of fury flying about the big house.

Word has run to Crebillon of the doings on the Tideboy place. Public sentiment at last turns against Hal, at least for the moment. Shep hears of a threat-

ened movement to raid and arrest the entire gang of tramps; and of an unofficial plan to gather a large vigilance committee to attend to the revelers without the slow assistance of the law. Tar, feathers, fence rails appear in this latter plan. The monk of Abancourt Bayou makes sure that rumors of these beautiful promises get to the 'Frisco Kid, Topeka Tim, and the rest, by way of the negroes.

And Friday night he follows them at a distance as they scuttle across the country to the railroad and board a freight train halted at the water tank, between three and four in the morning. When the train pulls out he waves his hat and yells in glee almost hysterical, and sits on a cross-tie in the sheer weakness of strained nerves at last eased loose. A passenger train roaring out of the distance presently drives him away and back home.

The nightmare is over. But will not it or something like it happen again? Hal is unpredictable, incredible, terrifying. Shep doesn't know. He now dares look only to the end of the crop already begun. If he can but reach that goal he will make the change back to Austin. Mrs. Denham must be forced to protect herself by flight to some place of temporary or permanent refuge.

Arrived at the big house, he decides it is too late to go to bed. Besides, it is Saturday and the grist mill

must run. Soon its whistle will be rolling in long billowing waves out across the country. He goes to the engine shed, and sits dozing on a box while the negro in charge pokes the fire and gets up a head of steam. He has eaten little and slept less since Monday. He thinks he has been asleep but a minute when the negro engineer wakes him to go to the big house for breakfast. Mrs. Denham doesn't appear. Loretta is talking her head off. The five days have really been a delightful excitement to her, though she rages with indignation at the departed rabble.

Sunday Shep sleeps straight through, rising at night to eat, smoke, and go to bed again. Monday he puts the store in order, sending Pompey and Seneca to town with two wagons for goods to restock it. Within three days the Tideboy place is running along peacefully and smoothly again. Mrs. Denham sits again at the table, characteristically making no comment about the past week herself and silencing Loretta with blazing black eyes and bent black brows if she attempts to recall it.

The next month Hal returns, by no means contrite or humble but at least alone, sober, and quiet. He is again without money, but he makes no immediate demand on the treasury. Thank the pow-

ers of harmonious and sweet reasonableness, thinks the side-tracked student, maybe the prodigal will now settle down, for another year or so anyway. But it will do no good to preach at him; he will readily confess what a thoroughly bad egg he is.

Hal has, disturbingly for Shep, the air of a visitor from the start. He lays hold of nothing that looks like work. He sits about in the store, or at the big house, or out in the field where the tall young man in the hickory shirt and pinkish jeans trousers sometimes spends a half-day trying to catch up with his plowing on the thirty-acre tract. Hal devotes most of his time to Shep, exerting all his remarkable powers of amiability. He isn't apologetic, but he obviously wants to patch up a friendship he fears is broken; and he does it.

A few days after his return he goes to town. There he is, as the violently virtuous Cesar Honfleur joyfully reports later, snubbed and cold-shouldered by everybody except the hangers-on about the saloons and pool-rooms; and he comes back sober, subdued, and a little worried. And after that trip to Crebillon he obviously has something to say to Shep which he hesitates about saying.

One dull afternoon the two of them are in the store, alone. Shep is standing behind a counter

straightening up things. Hal sits at luxurious sprawling ease in a chair tilted back against the counter, whittling.

"Brother Shep," he calls over his shoulder, "why the devil don't you take over this place? It's more than half yours anyway. You've carried on while I deserted. You've made it run. You've lifted one of the notes, you could make it a success if you'd give yourself to it. I know I advised you to stick to your student life, but maybe that has begun to pall on you. I don't know what's in your head for the future, but I do know that you deserve to have the land and all that's on it, the big house and all that's in it. You *could* foreclose your mortgage, I'm well aware of that, though I'm sure you wouldn't. But you could buy me out easily. I've a notion you'll have to take over the plantation ultimately. You might as well do it now. Why not?"

The side-tracked student is in terror at this threat against his freedom. Cold chills race along his back. "Don't be an ass, Hal. I'm going back to Austin. When will you take charge here? I don't intend to quarrel at you, telling you what a scalawag you've been—you'd agree too quickly—but it's up to you to take hold here and let *me* go. It is too late for me to do anything at the university this summer, it closes in June; but I'll be sitting on the steps wait-

ing for the doors to open in October. Besides, I've a lot of reading I want to do on my boat this summer if I can only find the time. Be generous. Help me out. Imagine *I'm* a tramp. I can't sit still and see the old place go down again, now that it is getting up.

"Come, Hal, why can't you take charge at once? You'll be in the swing of things within a week. Habit will catch hold of you, and soon you'll be again the promising planter you were. The plantation's yours. You put new life into it, you started it on its new way. Take it back and run it. I don't want to. What the deuce *will* you do if you don't farm?"

"Do what've been doing lately—bum around. That's what I am—a bum. I don't seem to mind a little work now and then, and I don't care much what it is—dish-washing, mill-hand, steamboat deck-hand, sandwich man, circus roustabout, anything, though I do rather like a circus. The company? I like low company for a while, I always have; I'm in one of my low periods now. I've had them before. I don't know if I'll ever recover from this one."

"And your wife, Hal?"

The prodigal lets his chair suddenly down to the floor, stands up and faces Shep. "Now, don't fly off

the handle, my tall infant; I want you to listen to me. Shep, you might as well take over Ida too. I'm no good. I'm a black sheep, a bad egg, an unreliable citizen, and all that. I think I'm beyond redemption this time. You take her. I love the little spitfire, but I can't do anything with her. Maybe you could. If you can get any continued sweetness and light out of her you'll beat me. And yet I don't blame her, not a great deal. I'd need a saint of patience to put up with my doings. She could get a divorce. Of course I know you're married, but perhaps—"

"Hal!"

"Yes, Shep?"

"Do you remember a blow on the jaw you received from me once? I had you at a disadvantage then; you were drunk and I was sober. Probably I couldn't repeat that blow, but I could try."

"Shep!"

"Yes, Hal?"

"I knew those loafers in town were telling me a damned lie. Will you shake hands, my tall infant with the straight nose?"

His thin-skinned face flaming, Shep extends his hand across the counter, and they stand holding each other closely, looking into each other's eyes.

Nevertheless Hal doesn't lose his air of a visitor, and he avoids the subject of taking charge of the

plantation again. The atmosphere at the big house remains, for him, cold, sullen, savage. And ten days later he rides a horse to town and sends it back by a negro. He is gone again, taking little money; there has been little at this lean mid-season to let him have. And once more the side-tracked student is in the depths of gloom; gloom, desperation, and a surreptitious, unacknowledged, shabby gladness.

The last Friday in April often comes back clear in his memory. All day the weather is warm and damp, the young crops and the vegetation in the woods swooning under the stimulation of the sun-stimulated earth. The monk strayed out of the Middle Ages thinks he can see the corn and cotton leaping up; feels himself profoundly stirred, and is strangely restless, going from one thing to another, eager for the darkness to come; darkness quiet and full of closely personal memories of Phoebe.

There was, he remembers, an affliction from which the medieval monks often suffered. The books called it *accidia,* saying it was something that drowned them in melancholy sloth or drove them to mad impulsive deeds beyond their vows. Was this the cause of his almost frantic unrest?

Rising from the supper table at the big house, he goes directly to his boat. Pulling back the curtain in the corner of his bedroom, he stands a long time

looking at Phoebe's yellow ball dress, black mantilla, the little gilt slippers, the silk stockings and all the rest of that sweet, vivifying outfit which brings her back so near to him. He lays all the things on the bed, puts with them Marguerite, Gwendolyn, and Arthur, leaning against a pillow, and sits in a chair in front of them, touching them from time to time, living over again his time with the Little Elizabethan.

To-night she returns in her more intimate rôles, and he clinches his long hands until the knuckles crack. Clear detailed images crowd forward in his mind—Phoebe in his arms, her head pressed into the hollow of his shoulder, the look and feel and sound of her the night she ran away from Cesar Honfleur and the sheriff; Phoebe lying asleep early of a morning, her yellow hair spread out on the pillow, her lips apart, so still that in fear he glances quickly at her breast for evidence of life; Phoebe returned from the theater in Austin and too excited to go immediately to bed, dancing about the room in long black stockings and short white chemise, imitating a girl in the chorus of the play just seen; Phoebe, Phoebe, her breath as sweet as a young calf's, her hair as soft as silk and as fresh to smell as hay, the touch of her soft flesh, her whispered laughter—a thousand sights and sounds and odors

and tactual impressions come rushing back bringing the Little Elizabethan who was his friend, his sweetheart, and his wife.

His blood is on fire, and he breathes with difficulty. Going to the screened bow of the boat, he sits in an old canvas camping chair. The yellow light streaming out of the window on the bayou side is threaded with tiny winged insects weaving through and through it. It shows a floating bush now caught between two logs, rhythmically dipping its green head in the dark water, up and down, up and down, under the force of the slow, irresistible current. The light shines on cupped water lilies along the opposite shore, and plunging on into the forest is lost.

Phoebe is out here too. The full white moon, risen late, clothed in filmy clouds, leaping up into the sky, that is Phoebe. The bayou whispering in the night, it also is Phoebe. The soft wind, as damp as a kiss and as sweet, with faint scents of purple violets in the low swampy places and wild pink and white roses on the uplands, it is the girl who has gone away.

Leaping up, he dashes out into the woods, tramping about aimlessly, treading the ground hard under his heels, breaking through tangles of bushes with sensuous violence. He expects to be gone only a little while; he is away more than two hours, as his

watch shows when finally he looks at it, three miles from his boat. He comes fighting back toward the bayou, his mind full of the lost sweetness of Phoebe and of fury at himself.

He comes back, but he feels he will not go to bed this night. He will sit up and try to study out some plan of recapturing her. Why has he been sitting around so long? No good has been done that way. He forgets all the reasons he has had for his previous line of conduct; all that matters is that he has not, it now seems to him, sought eagerly enough for her. He will find a manager for the farm, put him in charge without consulting Mrs. Denham, and go out into the world to look for Phoebe. If he shouldn't find her he will have achieved no less than he has accomplished by sitting around. And it will be a relief to be moving about. Yes, he will go; he *must* go. Mrs. Denham shall make the best of the arrangements he provides for her. He will go on his money as long as it lasts; then he'll work a while, go on, and work again, always and everywhere searching for Phoebe.

The great white moon is now above the tree-tops, sluicing shining streams down between the closely set branches, dotting the gray ground with pools of light so palpable that he catches himself stepping over them, and is wildly angry with himself, shout-

ing "fool" in his mind. He must get inside, into a dark place, and sit until day. The woods to-night have given him no ease, they have stimulated his imagination. He will go aboard his boat, pull down the shades to shut out the moon, and await the morning.

Running across the gang-plank bridging the space between the shore and the boat, he flings back the door of his bedroom and stops in his tracks. Standing at the window opposite, dimly illumined by the light coming through it, is a figure wearing a black mantilla over her head. Her white shoulders and arms are bare; she is wearing the commencement dress, he remembers every line of it. Her back is to him, and she doesn't turn.

Phoebe! This would be like the little dramatist, coming through the dark to find him, piloted probably by Loretta, and then robing herself in the clothes he had laid out on the bed. In a moment he will hear her laugh and see her running toward him with her arms open. But he can't wait for her to start. As he moves the figure turns and comes to him, and they meet in the semidarkness of the middle of the room. His mouth finds hers, and her hands go feeling about his body.

"Oh, don't say anything," he whispers. "Let's stand just as we are for a moment. Hush, we can

talk another time. Then you can tell me all about it. I was going after you if you hadn't come. I swear I was. Hush, and let me feel your heart beat against me."

"Kiss me again, Shep. I hate Hal—the way he's been doing, the way he'll always do. Oh, don't let me go now. Hold me tighter and tighter. I feel your arms loosening from about me, and your body is resisting me. Oh, Shep, now I feel you coming back. Hold me close a little while longer, then light the lamp and look at me. You think I'm a grubby, sour little old Scotchwoman. You'll see—I've made myself pretty for you to-night."

"You must take off Phoebe's things, Ida. You don't understand about *them,* you don't understand. I'll go outside and wait. Then I'll see you home; maybe you'd lose your way by yourself."

"No, Shep, you *must* see me first. Light the lamp. I did my best at home, but when I came and saw them there on the bed they were more beautiful than mine. So I put them on. Loretta has told me she was of about my size. Light the lamp, and after a while I'll take them off.

"Why are you so rough with me, Shep? You're gentler to your old plow horse than you are to me, But you must be tender with me to-night or I'll die. All the world seems tender to-night but you. We are

both deserted, you and I. Have you no fellow-feeling for me, Shep? I am so lonesome all the time, so wretched to-night that you could kill me if you're rough with me. No, let the lamp alone now. Come to the window and let's see the moonlight lying on the water, and hear the old bayou whispering secrets to the listening cypress trees, and smell the soft wind with flowers in it. Come, Shep!

"Ah, you're so cold you make me shiver, so silent you make me babble like a foolish hysterical woman. But I don't care. I've been holding myself in so long, Shep, so long; now I'll turn myself loose. Phoebe—Loretta told me she was spirited and full of life, and how she talked. By gannies, *I* can let myself go too when I want to.

"For God's sake, say something, Shep, or I'll die of shame. You strip me naked with your silence. Help me drape this mantilla over my shoulders, or my teeth will chatter. Now put your arm around my waist and hold me hard against you. There, that's better. Look, the water lilies have closed their eyes and lie asleep on the bosom of old Abancourt. God, how I love it to-night. Lean down, my tall infant, and kiss my breasts, they're so cold. Oh, but your kisses leave them all the colder. How still the woods are across the bayou, and how tense and alive! I can almost hear them breathe.

"Go light the lamp, Shep, and look at me; then I'll take your lost Phoebe's things off. She'll never know. If she did she wouldn't care, now. Maybe I fit into them better than she would to-night. Maybe she has grown stout in all this time, or very much thinner. I looked at her picture there on the table; she *was* a little skinny, wasn't she, Shep? But her things fit me almost perfectly to-night. I had to lace myself very tight to make the dress fit, but it is stylish to lace that way. I've been a country jake so long. Go light the lamp, Shep, and look at me."

The yellow light spreads out through the room as the wick heats and draws up more oil. He sits by the table against the kitchen partition, his head in his hands. She bends down in front of him, lifts his chin and kisses his forehead.

"Oh, won't you look at me just once, Shep? Am I so repulsive as that? If you'll look at me then I'll take your poor lost Phoebe's things off. Look, Shep, was her skin smoother and whiter than mine? Were her arms rounder, her eyes brighter, her voice more tender? Was she so much more graceful than I? When you came in to-night I fitted into your arms so closely you didn't notice it wasn't Phoebe until I spoke. Look, Shep!"

Between the bed and table there is a clear space. She begins walking and dancing around in a circle,

trailing the wide silk skirt against his legs each time she passes him, looking back over her shoulder with shining eyes and lips apart. And presently, stooping, she blows out the light. He sees her stand hesitant a moment in the dim room, then run to the door, open it and go racing up the gentle hill among the pines, holding her skirts away from her feet. He follows, calling, "Ida! Ida!" And after a while he finds her.

· XIII ·

Tears and a Pig's Bladder

VERY early one morning in June of that year a train of green cars was switched on a railway siding in Austin. There had been a shower shortly before, and the cars shone where lights fell on them, and great gold letters stretched along their sides said that here was Captain Patrick Dooin's Colossal Circus, Hippodrome and Coliseum. Papa Dooin suspected that the word hippodrome had to do with horses, and he had many horses. As for coliseum he didn't know what it meant but, together with hippodrome, it rounded off the title of his two-ringed entertainment so splendidly that he had refused to be pernickety about mere meanings. That was like Papa Dooin. His mind was as broad as his back.

The circus was to stay in Austin three days; not that the probable business there justified more than two days, but he had canceled a date ahead because of a conflict with a confounded dinky little pony show, and besides he had a lot of accumulated wagon-repairing and horseshoeing to attend to.

In the second car from the last, a car with many small windows, Phoebe lay in a lower bunk, wide-awake. She hadn't slept soundly once during the night. To come back to Austin after so long—it seemed long to her—was too exciting an event to permit sleep, and she had a plan to execute that she must start at early. She had been dropping into a doze when the shower began pattering on the tin roof of the car, bringing her back to wakefulness instantly; she could see young Shep running up to the attic of the big house to listen to the little drums on the shingled roof.

Poking her head through the green curtains, she looked down the aisle of the car. It was dark except for a dim illumination falling from a tiny night-light at each end of it. She could hear only the well-known snoring and groaning of Mlle. Lolita Casalla, alias Betty Gray, the lion tamer. Except Phoebe everybody seemed asleep; no noise and jolting of cars on bumpy switches with gaping rails, could disturb them, nor roar or snarl or scent of animals imprisoned in small compass on a hot damp night. Austin was just another place to stop in, do their stuff, and leave without regret.

But to La Petite Julie, "the funniest woman in the world," as Papa Dooin proudly billed Phoebe, it was the best-loved city within her crowded memory,

and she had been promising herself for weeks, ever since she had known it was on the itinerary, a pilgrimage to the hill where she and Shep had lived through days that now seemed golden to her.

She had no hope, or fear, of meeting anyone important that she knew. Without meaning to spy, she had kept what she thought was a discreet watch on her student husband. The first autumn after her disappearance with Professor Williger and his two red-headed daughters she had sent for a catalogue of the university, and there among the faculty of the Department of History was Shepherd D. Tideboy, listed as a Fellow. The three friends, Beddoes, Heydler, and Vallati, were also in the catalogue. She had visualized the four of them with one of those adorable old college mothers who loved the students and reverenced the teachers.

The next autumn the catalogue had shown them again. The third year the three friends had dropped out of the list; gone on their wandering student way, she told herself. But Shep was still there. As to him, all was going according to schedule, she had said to herself, and that was a happy fact offsetting many things for her. The fourth year Shep had disappeared from the catalogue. Good again! She had been sure that he had headed for that Eastern university of which he had talked so much, which

had a great library and a history chief reputed to be himself an addict of the Middle Ages. That's how Shep had described him.

She had thought she could see Shep giving all his time now, week in and week out, to his precious province, and making gigantic strides in it. Beddoes and Heydler had said he was a wonder in his line, and would go far with half a chance. Well, he was having his chance. Now he had no household burdens to eat up his hours, surely no financial problems to worry him, and no vexatious foolishnesses of a flighty partner forever flunking her job all around and diverting to herself much more attention than she deserved or he could afford, under the circumstances, to give her.

And the end of it all? She hadn't dared think of that in detail. But sometime, when he had won a position that had a look of finality about it, and had settled down, and when she had wandered until the restlessness was out of her vagabond feet, and soaked in some sense from the mere washing of time and experience, then she might walk in on him away up yonder in the East, or maybe at the big house during vacation time, and say, "Hello, Shep, here I am again," and stick around; at least for a while, maybe for good. He wouldn't lecture her, she was certain, or ask a million suspicious questions, or

moan about things already done. If he hadn't married again, and she couldn't at all see him doing that, he would take her in, and say no more about it. As for his beloved old centuries, she had long ago stopped being jealous of them. There they were, you couldn't do much about a century.

But she must be crawling out of that bunk and begin rustling about, for the day would be short for what she had in mind. She must take part in the morning parade and in the afternoon and night performances. Papa Dooin was indulgent as to everything except slack work; back in San Antonio he had kicked out Billie the Bad-Egg Man for nothing more serious than a rowdy carouse ending in arrest, promoting to his stand that jolly stout Englishman they called Hal, who had been with the show only a short time and as a stake-driver and general roustabout at that. Yes, by gannies, she'd cover her job and make her pilgrimage too. Therefore she must raise the body that very minute.

The window was open, and holding apart the curtains she looked out. The wet rails were glistening lines under the lights, and the red and green switch lanterns blinked at her. She lifted her snub nose at the animal odors drifting back on the wind, making a wry face.

Presently the wind shifted, and she caught the

smell of freshly boiling coffee somewhere near. She wasn't hungry, but she'd snatch something at the station lunch-counter; she'd need all the strength she could muster for the day's doings. Up forward there was some commotion and a small crowd, mostly of town boys no doubt risen early and congregated here to see the circus come in. She knew what the commotion meant; they were taking off Little Breeches the elephant, who was calm enough on a moving train but devastatingly restless when it had stopped for a while.

She too was devastatingly restless this morning, and getting out of the solidly built bunk she set to work dressing as quickly and as quietly as she could. By now she was an adept in the art of putting on and taking off clothes swiftly. In the small compartment at the end of the car she washed her teeth and face and hands, gave her short hair a lick or two with brush and comb, and was ready. Her short hair was surely a convenience, besides being a necessity for her profession, but what would Shep think if he could see it. He had loved her long yellow hair. Oh, well, she sighed, her hair must remain as short as a boy's; a clown can't make up with a thick mop of hair to contend with.

Lifting her chin, she shook her head as if to throw back a great lot of hair, as if to throw off

worry, and stole out of the car. She had told Papa Dooin she'd get up early to visit local friends.

Stepping gingerly across the rails, she found the inevitable station lunch-room with high stools, odorous counter, and great flat clock hanging against the wall. It was a quarter past four. Two eggs, a rancid cruller as hard as a rock, and black coffee in a thick mug as heavy as lead delayed her twenty minutes—the waiter was sleepy and slow—and then she was striding up the deserted main avenue, that felt so familiar under her feet.

Here she had wasted many guilty hours, she told herself, when she should have been boning desperately with the learned tots uptown. The wet pavement glistened under the lights, and she sent her eager eyes along it until they rested on the dim bulk of the capitol standing at the head of Congress Avenue. A milk wagon or two, a single policeman, a half-dozen dissipated cats, these and she owned the town at this hour, and she was glad because thus it was all the more hers.

Turning a corner, she stopped in front of the theater which had been the scene of so many joyous releases for her and her studious, long-legged, concentrated boy. She often thought of him so, and now on her lips and in her blue eyes was a faint rem-

iniscent smile that had in it love, pride, and all-forgiving indulgence.

There on the bills of the theater was, once again, Lewis Morrison, to come soon, still playing of course "Faust"; and she thought of his *Marguerite* and hers—Marguerite, Gwendolyn, and Arthur. The big type blurred and ran together in her eyes, and she hurried back to the drug-store corner to await the arrival of the old belt-line car.

Perhaps it didn't run this early in the morning; but the small brown house uptown had been near the western loop of the track, and she thought she could remember hearing it in all the still thin hours of the morning bumping and clanging down the grade to the city. She would wait a while anyway; she didn't want a cab even if she could find one in front of the near-by Driskill Hotel. In the old time, even on their most unlucky days, it had always come before hope was entirely dead. And what a thrill it had given them then!

Sometime after five o'clock she was the sole passenger on a car crawling up the hill toward the college settlement. It was going the wrong way around for her immediate purpose, though she didn't mind that; it would pass the university, and she could see the buildings and the vast green campus, for now

had come the white virgin light of early morning all dappled with spots of pink.

Down at the street end of the brown graveled walk, where the car usually stopped, was still the seat between two trees. Here she had often waited to join Shep on his way home, her legs crossed and brazenly exhibiting at least three inches of her thin shanks, rolling her eyes wickedly at self-conscious young males passing by; she envying with sinful intensity the girls who were already duly authenticated students up there on the crest of the hill where, it seemed, she could never be a full partner of his. An image drifted into her mind of Shep coming down the graveled path with long swift strides, springing up on his toes, his black felt hat pulled down over his spectacles, his hands full of books, quickening his pace at the sight of her. She suddenly caught her lower lip under her teeth, and stared down at her hands twisting in her lap.

She went the round on the car to the upper end of the city, then braced herself for the rapid clamorous coast downhill. When it had again come even with the university she got off and walked out toward the edge of the settlement, halting by a white picket fence beyond which a tall stooping old man with snowy bristling mustachios was walking among his flowers. Yrogen! That was his name; she never

could remember it except when he was before her eyes.

"Hello, Mr. Yrogen!" she called, leaning on the fence.

Hurrying forward, he bent down to look closely at her. "It is, yes, it is Señora Tideboy! Will you be my neighbor again? No? I am so sorry. Will you not take some roses this morning? You liked the deep red ones, I remember. Oh, yes, *I* remember. Only one! Take this then; I have just cut it. See, señora, the dew shines yet upon it—and upon you also. My compliments to Señor Tideboy!"

He bowed, shook her hand again, and she walked very slowly across the road, the deep red rose to her lips, her eyes on the small drab brown house that had no flowers in its yard. On the front porch two full milk bottles sat, and in the hackberry tree in the back yard a mocking bird was singing. Smoke rose out of the kitchen chimney. Across the street on the side of Mr. Whalen's dilapidated old stable she saw a huge circus bill, and in large type something about La Petite Julie, "the funniest woman on earth."

She stood by the gate, her head down, her hand lifting the latch and letting it fall softly again; and then she walked slowly along the fence, touching the top of each paling, and suddenly went running

up the deserted sidewalk, crying desperately into her tiny handkerchief.

She hurried up one street and down another, and a little before eight entered the main building of the university. Only a few students bound for early classes were visible. The corridors were quiet. She climbed the stairs to that lonesome upper floor where, around the edges of the rotunda, were ranged a circle of geological specimens, and where, she remembered, young men and women often met in pairs about the bits of rocks, studying the labels closely if a teacher came in sight.

Here in the beginning she had often met Shep of an afternoon, he and she as secret and as ecstatic as any of the other lovers, and they had gone downstairs and out across the campus and then for jolly walks far downtown for long-planned contests with merchants, momentous and thrilling because of their keen, large wants and small bank account, or out among the western hills where huge red fires floated when the sun went down.

The eight o'clock gong sounded, and she jumped as if it were the bell at the circus summoning her into the big tent. She strolled through the corridors of this high floor, still dim and quiet; and then descended to the next floor and its corridors; and so until she had come again to the ground floor. She

stepped through the door of an empty classroom. On the blackboard behind the platform was a yesterday's solved problem in mathematics. It looked terrifyingly complicated and utterly heroic to her.

On all these floors and in many of these rooms Shep had fought and beautifully won his student battles. So she said to herself. Here she too had hoped to be a student, that she might be a better partner for him, and couldn't ever be, because she had flunked her battles of the books. Now it was too late. She drew a deep sigh, lifted her chin, shook her head, and hurried outside and down the brown graveled walk to the car line.

After the night performance Phoebe sat in the dressing tent on a trunk, her face covered with white and red paint, her pointed felt cap on her head, the peacock feather and blown-up pig's bladder by her side. All the other performers had gone into the city or to the circus train. The big tent, into which she could see now that the flaps had been pulled aside, was dim and achingly lonesome. The lion that had lost his mate a month before was roaring with a moan in his thunder. Or so it seemed to her. Poor old Kit!

Phoebe saw the jolly stout Englishman they called Hal drifting through the big tent in her direction. His work had been done long ago, she knew; he

was the man who rigged up a white sheet between two poles outside, employed a negro to stick his head through a hole in it, and then ballyhooed people into paying for the privilege of throwing doubtful eggs at the dodging grinning black head, promising to each of them "an elegant and costly prize" if they hit "the handsome blackamoor," as Hal bellowed with an infectious grin.

He belonged outside, but he now went everywhere; he had captured the entire personnel of the show within a week after joining it in Galveston as a stake-driver and general roustabout. Papa Dooin already loved him like a son. The other roustabouts, so far from envying his swift promotion, were proud of it. He was as amiable to the surly dyspeptic chief cook as to Papa Dooin himself. He neither toadied nor bullied nor bluffed.

No one had seen him smoke or drink; or had heard him say anything mean or nasty; and yet such unexampled virtues in a bad-egg man were somehow taken as a matter of course in Hal. He sympathized with and gave wisely humorous advice to the hypochondriac Wild Man of Madagascar in the side-show, or to the great Challifer of the trapeze who was sick of the circus and wanted to start a chicken farm whenever he could find a good location. Papa Dooin said Hal was a prodigy and a

model, and destined for great things in the circus business if he stuck to it.

He was always welcome to every part of the show. He came lounging toward the little pantalooned figure in white spotted with four gigantic polka dots of red and blue, sitting on her trunk with her left knee pulled up against her chin; his head lowered, as was his way, his reddish brown eyes looking at her quizzically and keenly.

"Hello, Little Julie! You should be in your bunk asleep by now, and you haven't even scrubbed your face yet. What's the matter?"

She made room for him to sit on the trunk by her. "Nothing, Hal; I'm a little off to-night, that's all."

"Tired, Little Julie?"

"Yes, I reckon so. I hadn't thought about it."

"Look here, old girl, I have a warning to give you."

"What is it, Hal? Something from Papa Dooin? They say you're his unofficial right-hand these days. What's the trouble?"

"He says you're taking too many chances with the animals. It's all very well for you to get the laughs and even the shudders, he says, but he doesn't want you hurt; and he's worried. You didn't used to do these impromptu dare-deviltries with the

beasts, he points out, and he is wondering why you do them now. He doesn't at all want you to; he says you're good enough without them."

"Well, bless his great black mustache, but that's the answer, Hal. Something's gone out of me this last year, I reckon. While the show was hibernatin' last winter I was in a hospital in St. Louis. Nothing organically wrong—you know how they talk; only I was to be quiet, an' eat a lot, an' rest, an' not worry, an' so on an' on. Well, I did it for two months, or thought I did. Anyway they gave me a clean bill of health an' told me to trot along. But all this spring I've had a notion I wasn't earnin' the laughs I once did; an' so I began playin' with mules' tails, ticklin' tigers with my peacock feather, an' next week, unless they watch me, I aim to ride old Kit the lion."

"Why, you jolly little artist, you! I knew many of your kind in Paris, Julie. Don't you realize that all of you have that fear now and then—that you can never do your stuff again, that you're gone, you're lost, you're a fake and must conceal the loss for a while, for as long as you can!"

"Hal, you darlin' old Solomon! Do you really know what you're talkin' about? I'll be dogged if I don't believe you do. What must I do about it, Solly?"

"If you were English, Julie, I'd say take a dose of Eno's Fruit Salts and keep your pecker up. As you're American, I'll say take a teaspoonful of Sal-Hepatica and forget it, meaning by 'it' the ghost that haunts all people who happen to be artists and yet are decently modest about their gifts."

"Hal, you won't tell on me, will you? I'll be good about the beasts hereafter. Keep my confession a dark secret, Hal. I don't know why I ever told you; I've told nobody else. You may be partly right, but only partly. But anyway keep what I've said under your belt."

"Little Julie, I know nothing. You never said it. But buck up. You've got thirty years yet, if you want them, before you retire to your chicken farm. Circus people—and all wandering homeless people, I suppose—seem to think their special heaven will be divided up into farms well supplied with celestial hens laying golden eggs."

"Well, Hal, I did spend some time on a farm once, and, by gannies, I liked it too. Old Challifer's not so far wrong, I'll tell you. No, he isn't, an' that's a fact."

Hal grinned encouragingly, and she grinned with him. "Where were *you* ever on a farm, Little Julie?"

"Oh, not so terribly far from here. I've been thinkin' about it to-night, an' the people who were

with me there. But it wasn't any ornery little chicken ranch; it was an honest-to-goodness plantation. Away up in the piney woods of northern Louisiana, it was, Hal, near a bayou they called Abancourt, an' I think I'll never be as happy again as I was there."

He pushed his wide Panama hat down over his eyes, and picking up the clown's bladder held it between his hands, and bent his eyes on it as if he were seeing things in a crystal globe. She was looking away as if seeing things down long beautiful vistas.

"I lost my pappy there—he was the best old sport in six states, Hal—an' I thought my heart would twist out of my body. But then something happened that eased the pain, an' cured it, or made me forget it, an' then there was a time so perfect, Hal, that surely nobody could expect to have it more than once."

"At the big house near Abancourt Bayou, Little Julie?" He didn't raise his head, and his voice was low. She glanced quickly at him.

"Yes, it *was* a big house. On the old plantations they called the owner's house that to mark it off from the smaller houses an' quarters on the place, though the 'big house' wasn't always so very large. But this one was too big for us; it was large enough

for three or four families like ours, especially in these days when there are no droves of slaves to act as servants. It was an old house, Hal, sittin' back among the trees with red-brick walks around it; old an' fine an' gentle an' friendly, a sweet island of peace in a sea of quiet. An' sometime, Hal, I aim —but never mind that."

"Were there any negroes on the place, Little Julie?"

"There was one we called Seneca. He was a tenant share-farmer. There wasn't anything very special about him; he was just a grayish black little negro with a wry neck, an' I recall him first, I reckon, because I saw one just like him sittin' on the high driver's seat of an old-fashioned public carriage away back yonder in Vicksburg this spring, at the railroad station. We were stayin' there two days— it was before you joined us, Hal—an' I told him to come to the tent after the night show an' take me for a drive around the city. I didn't think I'd care for the drive very much, but it was good to hear him talk; an' he looked so much like Seneca he made me homesick.

"He drove me out in the residential streets an' down to the river, which is a great yellow thing pushin' on with the power of a million locomotives, an' yet in it, Hal, a piece further down, is Aban-

court Bayou. Slow little Abancourt that used to seem barely to move most of the time. Abancourt that is so mild and restful, singin' low like a tiny old hen scratching in the fence-corner; an' yet it is over yonder, Hal, rampin' an' ragin' with the Mississippi, along with a thousand other rivers an' bayous, far away from its still woods an' green fields, lost in the crowd, an', I'll bet you, unhappy an' homesick as the very devil. Poor little Abancourt! All it wanted, maybe, all it needed, was a spell of vacationin' from the peace of the piney woods, a bit of a splurge an' fling out in the big world. But it can't go back now.

"Out in the residential section, Hal, I saw magnolia trees as tall as those in the front yard of our big house, an' a soft breeze up from the Gulf came washin' over the old carriage an' Seneca an' me; came with all the first flowers, I thought, that grew in our parish over yonder in northern Louisiana. I closed my eyes, Hal, an' almost thought I was sittin' on the high front porch at home on a balmy night, an' the spring wind down below whisperin' an' makin' love among the roses in our front yard.

"I heard a rooster crowin' for midnight—we were out on the edge of the city then, Seneca an' I were —an' a dog barkin'. Here an' there were lights, an' music that didn't bang an' blare, an' voices laughin' easily an' merrily; though most of the houses were

already sound asleep. But the people in them were at home, Hal.

"To-morrow, I said to myself, you'll all get up an' go about your affairs without any great hurry or worry or strain, an' at night you'll drift back, an' foregather with your families an' your friends; an' you'll know where everything is, an' what you're eatin', an' not once a month will *you* need to rush about with your tongues hangin' out. You'll have your little spats an' quarrels, oh, yes; but they won't matter much because you'll all know you mean well by each other. Home an' homefolks, Hal, an' days that go no faster an' make no more noise than little Abancourt comin' singin' down the green woods!"

"Why, Julie, you poor little homesick tramp, you're crying. Let me ask Papa Dooin to give you a leave of absence for the rest of the season? Go back to little Abancourt for a while."

"Homesick, Hal? Aye, Lordy, I'm so homesick I'm like to die. But—"

One of the night watchmen came in from the big tent, where now only one or two lights burned. He stood ten feet away staring at the little clown with her head held down and the portly Englishman in blue serge sitting on the trunk. "All the others went a long time ago," he said. "You know the boss, Mr. Hal; you all ought to be out of here."

"It's all right, Buck. We'll be on our way soon. I'll be responsible."

"It's up to you, Mr. Hal. Good night!"

"Good night, Buck!"

Kit the lonely old lion roared out in the animal tent, his voice thundering and moaning in his throat.

"Little Julie, won't you take a few months off? You *need* them."

"Hal, people who say they do or don't do something of importance because of some other *one* thing, are usually foolin' themselves. *I* know. It's because of twenty other things, at least, most of the time. Now, you know that to Papa Dooin it's a great black sin to miss just one performance unless you absolutely have to; an' then—"

"I know, Julie; he's a disciplinarian for fair. He's made even me toe the line; he has so far anyway. But you're exceptional, an' your case is exceptional."

"An' besides my time hasn't come to lay off yet; I've set myself a time, when something happens."

"When will it happen?"

"I don't know, Hal; an' even when it does, maybe it'll be too late for me. I'll have to see."

"Little Julie, you're not only homesick; you're in love."

"I am, Hal. Maybe he'll be somebody if I let him alone long enough. I reckon you won't believe it, but he's a university man—a student an' a teacher, more of a student than the other. He'll do things if he has an open chance."

"Perhaps he was a pompous intellectual bully, Julie? Squashed you at every turn, didn't he, made you feel small an' ornery, as you would say?"

"He did *not*. He's the real thing, Hal. I've met several of the real things in his line, an' I know. He doesn't take himself seriously enough. He's as shy as a girl ought to be, an' as modest as a man who is always thinkin' about what he doesn't know by the side of what he wants to know. Squash me? Aye, Lordy, he was so generous he thought I was a humdinger, Hal; an' if there was any squashin' I did it, bad luck to me, an' worried the life out of him, I expect."

"Does he know where you are, Julie? Why don't you tell him?"

"It's not time yet. Maybe the time will never come, for me. I had to take a chance, Hal; and maybe I muffed the whole thing. By gannies, you do have to gamble whether or not, don't you, Hal?"

"Do you know where he is, Julie?"

"Yes; well, I'm almost sure. He'll probably be comin' South on vacation pretty soon now, but he's

been up in the East all year, happy in his studies of the Middle Ages. That's his passion, Hal, an' he's mine, God help my poor soul."

"Get behind that flap, you poor, little, homesick, broken-hearted clown. Do your change. I'll wait for you, and see you to the train. It's far away from here, it's long past midnight, and Austin hasn't any too many policemen."

Walking to the car line, Hal said: "You're about my wife's size, Julie. When I stand by you your head comes about where hers did, and you remind me of her."

"Was she very like me, Hal, in other ways?"

"No, only in your height. She's a little heavier than you probably. Her hair is black, very black, and she keeps it plaited in small strands and wound closely all around the top of her head. Her eyes are black too, and very piercing, Julie; and her skin is as white as snow, with faint pink soaking out upon her cheeks. Her nose isn't at all like yours, either; it's thin, and straight until it gets to the very end, where it pulls down in a queer sudden way. She's Scotch. Her name's Ida."

"You love her, Hal; I can tell by the way you speak her name."

"Yes, Julie, I love her . . . But she doesn't love

me, now. And I don't blame her, not much anyway."

She put her hand on his arm quickly, and squeezed it. "Poor Hal! Don't say any more. I'll bet a horse you're mistaken."

"Cheerio, little Julie! We're both sentimental tonight. We're a pair of homeless, tin-can vagabonds. We'll see what to-morrow brings, and to-morrow after that. We're here two more days."

Having helped her into one of the green cars, Hal hurried back uptown in search of an all-night telegraph office.

· XIV ·

Her Children of the Road

SHEP'S train arrives in Austin at 10:15 A. M. on Thursday. It is an hour late. Looking out of his window, he has seen as the train came in the circus cars on a distant siding. Leaping off before the locomotive has finally agonized to a halt, he goes striding back down the yard and across the tracks to the nearest green car. Only one person is in it, a cautious old guardian roustabout, disturbed by Shep's excitement. He will give no help; the angry and loudly talking inquirer had better go to the circus grounds and see Captain Patrick Dooin, who will provide all the information proper.

Hurrying back to the station, Shep finds a piratical-appearing open automobile in charge of a long, leather-faced, lantern-jawed buccaneer boy who names what Shep thinks is a small fortune for a day's use of his ugly craft. Shep places his valise on the floor as tenderly as if it had dynamite in it, and steps in. As the car rolls up Congress Avenue,

he unfolds Hal's telegram and studies it for the fiftieth time.

"Have found the Little Elizabethan. With Dooin's Circus. Here Wednesday and Thursday. In Palestine Friday. See me first. She does not know. Ask for Hal the Bad-Egg Man. Best name I ever had. Hal."

The car is on the way to the circus grounds. Shep hears, in the distance, the gasping tootling of a steam calliope, then the floating music of a brass band.

"She's comin', cap," the driver calls back. "Don't you want to see the parade first?"

"Yes, wait just inside that side-street yonder. I'll get out and come back here. Stick by your car and keep your eye on this valise. You can stand on the seat and see everything. I'll be back as soon as it passes."

He returns to the avenue and takes a stand on the edge of the sidewalk. Perhaps Phoebe and Hal will be in the parade, and he can recognize them. If he does he will not let them out of his sight. What the deuce can Phoebe be doing in a circus? Or Hal either? He has no idea what a bad-egg man is.

Crowds are now forming thickly on both sidewalks, the head of the parade in sight. Shep wants to run to meet it, but people are too close all about

him to permit that without something like a fight, and he decides anyway that he had better stay near the waiting car.

He glances about to see if he knows anyone within speaking distance. He hopes not; he wants to be free when the parade reaches him. He sees students of the unmistakable type, equally unmistakable state legislators with rather long hair and wide-brimmed black felt hats; Mexicans; a few townsmen whose names are familiar to him, and a vast lot of undifferentiated people of all degrees out for a short lark or an entire holiday—men, women, and innumerable children, creating a tremendous low buzzing sound and a nervously moving mass of many colors.

Shep is glad the sky is cloudy and the weather cool, if Phoebe is to be in the parade. With the sun unscreened the day would be broiling hot in June so far south. Suppose he does find Phoebe, will she come back with him? On the way down he has thought he could persuade her if he has a fair chance to talk to her, but now that the interview seems a possibility of the next few hours his assurance has left him.

He is in despair one moment, in the seventh heaven of hope the next. He has little to offer her, not even a home now, unless she will call the house-

boat that; and in his mood it appears a paltry home to take Phoebe to. Professionally he is a failure; a side-tracked student left behind, piddling around managing someone else's plantation, and doing that as an amateur, temporarily only.

But if Phoebe will come—well, there shall be a new beginning. He recalls how having her by his side once stimulated him to undertake things that at the time seemed nothing short of the heroic, considering what he then was and aimed to be, with her approval. But in the future he must remember that she cannot be a motionless sedentary grind, as he is; that her happiness comes from direct contact with life; that she must have change and color and drama of her own, the blessed Little Elizabethan!

Yes, and there must be a new beginning in other ways. He will—but the head of the parade is even with him now. Outriders in uniform bearing banners, Phoebe can't be among them. A gaudy wagon in green and gold full of musicians, she surely isn't there. A leisurely elephant and a group of painted houris in the howdah, he lets that pass.

A line of people have pushed out in front of him. He forces his way through them and stands on the edge of the curb, a few feet above the level of the street at that point, those about him scowling angrily

at the tall, red-cheeked young man in brown linen who pays no attention to them and keeps his eyes fastened on the moving figures of the procession.

A red wagon with the sides barred comes, and inside two recumbent lions and a woman standing with a whip in her hands. She can't be Phoebe; she is too stout anyway. Just behind it another red wagon with iron-barred sides, and inside it a small white lamb and a little clown crouching in a corner.

Shep sends his eyes back on down the slowly moving line. The little clown drops her whip, and picking up a feather and a bladder flings open a door of the wagon, jumps to the pavement and begins running forward and backward skylarking with the circus people and the spectators on the sidewalk. Phoebe stands in front of Shep with the painted bladder poised to hit him. His hat is off, and he is staring back along the parade.

"Shep!" she calls, and he looks down at her. She lifts her chin and shakes her head as if throwing back a great lot of hair. "Shep! Don't you know me, honey!" She stretches her hands up to him, still holding the peacock feather and the painted bladder.

The crowd is shouting and laughing now; this is part of the free show. Jumping to the street, he

takes her in his arms, kisses her once, and suddenly picking her up runs with great long-legged strides to the side-street, breaks through the line of people, and dashes toward the car he has chartered.

Word runs about that a big man has attacked a little clown hardly half his size. He is pursued by hoots and yells. The procession moves on, but a half-dozen circus men leap off horses and wagons and come storming to the side-street down which Shep has disappeared. There the crowd has already thickened, and they cannot get through at once.

A small panic is developing. Women begin screaming, and boys wild with excitement worm their way about yelling ecstatic nonsense— "Police!" "Murder!" "Fire!"

The head of the street is quickly jammed. Shep is in the car with his captive, her blue eyes shining, a seraphic grin on her thin face, lying back against the cushion. Shep stands up looking back; bareheaded, he has lost his hat in the crowd. The driver is cranking his machine, for it is an early day for automobiles. A man jumps on the running board, and lays hold of Shep, who knocks him off. Two more come, and he knocks them off. The driver leaps into the front seat. The car is almost surrounded.

"Get out of this!" yells Shep. "Straight ahead!"

The horn blares, the crowd opens up, the huge black car runs through it.

"Out toward the university," calls Shep, on his knees in the seat looking back. "Anywhere to get away from this mob."

Automobiles are rare in Austin in these early days, and nothing can be immediately found for the chase except horses, which are handicapped by a late start. The black car dodges about among a few streets, and then streams up the hill toward the university, now free of visible pursuit.

Shep sits down, opens the valise in front of him, and taking out three dolls with faded dresses lays them on Phoebe's lap. Dropping the feather and the bladder, she snatches up her little children of the road and holds them against her breast. People passing in carriages and cars shout and wave at the clown obviously out on a lark. The driver glances back, then quickly looks ahead again, pulling his cap down over his eyes. Shep sits with his left hand gripping the side of the car, his eyes fixed on a sliding scene he cannot see.

After a while Phoebe's left hand finds his right, and squeezes it hard.

"Shepherd!"

"Yes, Phoebe?"

"Arthur's color is much better than it was—clearer, not so muddy."

"I washed *all* their faces, Phoebe."

"Oh, Shepherd, did you!"

And the driver hears the little clown crying, and looking back sees the pantalooned figure in the tall man's arms.

· XV ·

Is It Arcady of Long Ago?

The monk, the clown, and the bad-egg man prepared to go back to northern Louisiana together. Phoebe, having had from Shep an outline of the Denhams in America, insisted that Hal come along with them. The return of two vagabonds, the reuniting of two couples, appealed too strongly to her sense of the dramatic to permit any spoiling of her plan by half-measures; and Hal was too genially generous to disappoint her, though there was in his mind a vague reservation as to an undramatic exit at some not too distant date. Papa Dooin, knowing little of the circumstances, stormed at him for letting slip "a colossal opportunity," finally telling him to look up the circus if he ever came to his senses.

By the time the party reached home Hal was so infected with Phoebe's enthusiasm that he thought he could see himself once more happily managing the farm, walking steadily in the path of all the rectitudes, reëstablishing his reputation, solidifying his

finances, and luxuriating in the joyful welcome of a relenting wife. And to his surprise Ida did this time welcome his return, in her tense, severe, undemonstrative way.

He urged that the Tideboys have half the big house as long as they remained in the country, assuming that Shep would go flying away to some university and the Middle Ages in September. But Phoebe had no intention of living in a house of which she was only partly mistress. The houseboat was the place for Shep and her, she said; it would be easy to take care of, an ideal place for study, a glorious quiet refuge in the deep woods for her. She wanted a long vacation far off the road that people traveled.

If it hurt her that Shep had sold the big house she didn't show it. If she was well-nigh heartbroken at his comparative failure as a student while she had been away, she didn't blame him, she blamed herself; and said nothing about it all. That was like the Little Elizabethan. As for him, he wished only that she be content, resolving that he would make her so if it lay in him to do it. He would let her be now, but would watch for evidences of restlessness.

Phoebe was a slap-dash housekeeper, doing her work in fiery spells, letting things drift easily in

between. She could not bring herself to keep up a steady daily routine, the same small things over and over again; that was too dull. Her housekeeping had always been a series of *tours de force,* not a regular grind; and yet her two previous homes had been jolly, livable places to Shep and everyone else that had come into them.

And now she flew at the house-boat. Calling in Seneca's placid, stout wife Airy to do the heavy work, she gave their floors their first scrubbing inside and out. Only the tin covering of the roof had been painted by Shep, a dark dull red merely to prevent rust. She set him to painting it green, and then the rest of the boat outside white. She commanded white for the inside walls of the living-room-bedroom, and buff for the ample kitchen. She strung across the windows white curtains with tiny pink figures in them, and herself painted chairs, benches, and home-made tables. The monk had stacked his books in piles on the floor. She had him build shelves against the walls; then he could see at once what he wanted, she said, and the two of them could walk around in the place without stumbling.

The bow and stern and the eight windows had been covered with iron screening, which had so rusted, she pointed out, that the air could hardly get

through the meshes. Presently the boat gleamed with new copper screening that would never rust.

She directed Airy to wash everything washable, and she laid on the grass everything that could possibly be benefited by the hot July sun. Flowers came into the boat for the first time, and finally a black kitten with great green eyes, named Little Breeches in affectionate memory of the seamy-sided old Dooin elephant.

Phoebe loved her new home. It was so small it could be transformed with dramatic swiftness. It was almost like coming early of a morning to a dull grassy flat on the edge of a town, chasing off the cows and the geese, and having it covered with white-topped tents streaming with flags, crowded with people and blaring with music by two o'clock that afternoon. She made a new and shining thing of the house-boat in two weeks, then let it alone. Shep pronounced it a gorgeous piece of work.

Phoebe had said she was tired of people, but she had meant vast groups of promiscuous people. Now while the student sat still on the bow of the boat buried, by her peremptory orders, in a book, she visited Mrs. Denham at the big house, doing most of the talking herself there; visited Hal at the store or out in the field plowing; visited the two negro families she had known—a very long time before, it

seemed to her—and the other tenants that had come in under Hal's régime; jumped in a buggy and made flying trips to Crebillon to have her hair cut, to listen to tempestuous Cesar Honfleur, always apparently so dissatisfied with the doings of his long-legged cousin, or to call on Mrs. Lydia Pilduff, who would often come back with her for a day or two of fishing.

Imprudent women, of whom the wise Mrs. Pilduff was not one, sometimes asked Phoebe crafty, roundabout questions about herself, especially during the mysterious time when she was apart from her husband. They asked also about Mrs. Denham, whom they looked upon as a fascinating puzzle, and perhaps a beautiful sinner, and last about the two husbands. Phoebe squashed them all, and passed on with her head high. Men didn't know how to ask such questions, or didn't dare, not even Cesar Honfleur; they escaped squashing.

Phoebe didn't neglect or harry Shep. Remembering his tendency to sit too still when once he had slipped among black printed pages, she commandeered his escort for long afternoon walks through the woods, sent him on hurried errands to the store for groceries or to the tenant-houses for vegetables, milk, and butter, accepted his old coöperation with the cooking and dishwashing, and got firmly be-

tween him and his books after sundown; the daylight hours were enough for study in the vacation months. So she said, and he agreed, grinning in delight at her captaincy.

Now and again at night they went together to see the Denhams, coming back across the fields arm in arm; sometimes shouting, or singing wordless songs that were little more than spirited shouting, not unlike that radiantly happy boy and girl who once before had walked there when the fallow fields were green and the paths overgrown with grass. Sometimes so shouting, yes, but not often; not unlike that boy and girl, but somehow a little different. Phoebe said this time was like a second honeymoon almost, nor noticed that she had said "almost."

The midsummer passed, and September was with them; a hot month in the South. Now Shep began putting forward eagerly tentative plans for their moving about. Wasn't she bored, shouldn't they travel a little? No, indeed, she had had a God's plenty of traveling, of seeing strange people and places; she wanted for these months nothing so much as this place to be quiet in, far from crowds and trains and cinders and coal smoke and hurry and bustle. So she said, convincingly.

Well, what did she think of his plan of taking a course in medicine, buying a wagon and team, and

going about over the country, as her father had done; for at least a part of each year anyway, returning to the house-boat whenever they pleased? Nonsense, she said; she laughed at her vision of him as an itinerant medicine man. No, if he was willing, she would rest while he continued his reading—there never seemed an end of his possible reading—and presently they would go on to some university, maybe now to that collegiate heaven in the East that had the inexhaustible library and the history chief who was himself an addict of the Middle Ages. He agreeing, the immediate future was thus plotted for them.

In her own mind she had already made this plan, trusting that Shep could be won to it. She had wisely presented it as more for her benefit than his own.

He had some money, and so had she; they could not suffer financially for some time. And before that time came, she told herself, people would no doubt be actually paying him for sharing with them the knowledge he had gathered, a sharing that would leave him no poorer in learning. She remembered the men and women at Austin who dug into books in their homes and libraries, lectured to classes, read some examination papers now and then, and received checks for so doing. It all seemed beautifully

easy to her, and for him it could not be otherwise than joyful work so long as he was working with his beloved old centuries.

Yes, the way was clear enough. And she and Shep belonged together; they didn't do well apart. Wherever he should be in the future she would be. Somehow this shy, long-legged, spectacled man with the big-pupiled gray eyes was for her, she was sure, the most satisfying person in the world to live with. She couldn't be content away from him. She had tried, she remembered that constant ache in her heart. He could irritate her, could make her want to fight him, but there was no peace for her, she knew, unless she were near him. And he hadn't got on well while he was away from her either.

One morning toward the end of September he was on his knees searching about in his larger trunk. She was in the kitchen, the door open between the two rooms; and he called to her. She ran in and leaned on his shoulder; a stooping figure in a clown's suit, her yellow hair still as short as a boy's. She was wearing out her clown's clothes to get the good of them, she had explained. It was also easier to move about in trousers, and besides no one that she "minded" would see her thus arrayed on the boat.

He had long ago told her of having advertised for

her in the personal columns of the newspapers. Now he held up to her one of the clippings that he had just run across: "Phoebe, come home; I need you —S. T."

"Did you really *need* me, Shepherd?" It was a magic word to her. "I wish to God I'd seen it. Do you need me *now?*"

He stood up, and they walked to the window looking out across the bayou, the morning sun high in the heavens and dropping down through the green tree-branches lacy white medallions upon the black water. He put his arm around her shoulder in the gesture of the days when they were first alone at the big house, comrade boy and girl together.

"Phoebe, I need you more than ever now."

She leaned against him, her head down, and bending he kissed her yellow hair.

"Shepherd, you must go on with your study; an' in the fall of next year, if you can keep busy with your books here that long, we'll start in again at some university. We'll not be as excited an' as scared as we were before, will we? There's no use o' my fiddlin' any more with books; I couldn't have done much with them, I reckon, if I'd started early; an' anyway it's too late for me to begin now. Do you know I'm twenty-four, Shepherd? Aye, Lordy, an old woman. I expect I'll be a plump party pretty

soon, breathin' like a wind-blown horse when I climb a pair of stairs; though I have gained only five pounds in five years. But that's a good deal for the likes of me, a little bag of bones.

"Yes, Shepherd, you must be the scholar of the family. I'm what I am, an' there's no changin' me now that way. All the learnin' and extra sense I'll ever have I'll just have to soak in somehow. But a lot of people like a spell of low company now an' then; so I'll be a sort of handy, ever-ready change for you.

"You can come away from your books an' your classes, steppin' straight over a thousand years to me an' this ornery day. Yes, an' I'll get on with your fancy friends too, I'll be bound. I made a go of it with Will Beddoes, Heydler, and Vallati. Shucks, they were easier to get on with than most people in the circus. Beddoes and the others were as simple as children, an' as honest, an' they never bluffed any, like people on the road. Not that I can't throw an awful bluff myself, Shepherd, when I've a mind to. But your fancy friends there in Austin didn't seem to know anything at all about bluffin'.

"So you go on your way, Shepherd, an' I'll always be somewhere within call; quiet an' not makin' any great noise, unless of course you have a mind for a little rough-house now an' then; lookin' after

what housekeepin' arrangements we may have— sloppily no doubt, not bein' a naturally finicky person, but well enough, I'll bet, to keep the buzzards out of our house; findin' work to keep me as busy as I want to be, an' play to entertain me when I think I need it. We'll go to a show once a week, as we used to do, an' ramble round town lookin' in show windows, an' out in the country when we can get away. As to all things, Shepherd, we'll just take what comes, or what we can decently come by, an' not fret one way or the other. By gannies, we'll get along, I'll be bound we will.

"An' don't you worry about entertainin' *me*, Shepherd. I see you're fidgety about that. I'm all right now: I think my feet have had enough of gaddin' about, an' my eyes enough of seein' new faces an' new scenes. Yes, let's stay here until next fall, if you can content yourself; an' then we'll make another start, together, never to be separated again if I can help it.

"Here by little old Abancourt, Shepherd, in these still green woods, away from people, we'll rest our weary bones an' gather strength for our new adventure, which we'll carry through to the end next time. Let Hal manage things— I don't blame you for takin' charge when Mrs. Denham was left alone

an' you thought the place was like to run down—but Hal's carryin' on, as he says it, an' seems glad to do it.

"Yes, let's stay until next fall. We were happy here once, weren't we, Shepherd? Aye, Lordy, it seems we couldn't ever be so happy again, but maybe we will, maybe we will. Anyway, what's done is done, we'll not worry about that. We're older now, an'—"

"Why, Phoebe, twenty-four isn't *anything;* you don't *feel* old, do you, you precious Little Elizabethan? I thought *you'd* never feel that way. Is anything bothering you, Phoebe? Tell me, and we'll straighten it out or tear up things trying. We'll stay here as long as you like, then we'll go wherever you want to go."

He lifted her chin, and bending down kissed her lips. Turning her body in his arms, she lay against him, her head pushed into the hollow of his shoulder. "Phoebe," he whispered, "do you feel *terribly* old to-day?"

"No, Shepherd, I'm all right. We'll make believe we're seventeen an' nineteen again, an' that the world was just beginnin' for us . . . Now run over to Seneca's house an' get the eggs an' the jug of buttermilk. We'll need them for dinner. Then

late in the afternoon we'll go for a long walk in the woods—five miles or so, I think, if you don't mind an' my short legs don't give out."

Standing out on the deck of the boat, she watched him disappear down the path, his tall body shut out of sight by the bushes and trees. She tiptoed quickly into the living-room, pulled aside the curtain covering Shep's improvised clothes closet, and carrying to a window the yellow silk ball dress turned it around in her hands, bending forward to scrutinize it sharply; as she had done more than once since her return from the circus. The skirt was scratched in several places, the black points of bamboo briers yet sticking in it; the seams of the bodice were widely stretched, and three hooks and two eyes were missing from the back, the threads dangling loose.

She hung the dress again in its place, and stooping picked up the two gilt slippers, now dull with tarnish. On the inside face of the right heel, up against the arch, was a patch of hardened dry gray mud, like that outside on the bank of the bayou. She wrapped them again in tissue paper and set them back under the dress.

Swallowing hard, and lifting her chin and shaking her head, she stole to a rocking-chair by the offshore window, her blue eyes, now much darker

than usual, looking as if through the wall and across vast stretches of space and time.

Outside a blue kingfisher scooped down at a minnow, trailing a short rackety screech across the silence. She felt the boat gently rise and fall on the current, the mooring ropes creaking under the strain. Absent-mindedly she patted lightly the arms of the chair, now with one hand, now with the other, holding her lower lip tightly under her little white teeth.

Presently rising, she took the three old dolls out of her trunk, laid them side by side on the bed, and kneeling pressed her head against the coverlet.

Ida Denham was going to have a baby in January. She wondered if Shep knew.

· XVI ·

The Proud Bad-Egg Man

Bruce Denham had two worshipers open and unashamed—the bad-egg man and the little yellow-haired clown. His mother was silently and grimly possessive, watching him constantly with her piercing black eyes, yet giving no evidence of thinking him a new marvel come to earth. As for Shep, he seemed to avoid the third member of the Denham family. The name of that bald-headed, amiable new-comer should have been Haliburton Henry, after the head of the house, he thought; but Mrs. Denham had settled that matter even before the event of birth. She had said Bruce, and so it was. Bruce was a favorite uncle of hers.

Phoebe had moved her black kitten and her household goods when wet blowy December came, occupying the western half of her old home; it was too muddy on the bayou after November, she had explained, and besides she had wanted to be near to lend a hand when Mrs. Denham's time came.

Hal had had bad news from England in Decem-

ber; his father had died, but somehow distance from the scene had softened the news. Moreover, he had been so excited by the approaching event of which his wife had told him immediately after his return from the circus that he couldn't long dwell on the image of the ruddy, round-shouldered, dictatorial old gentleman or on his own filial sins. The memories that had risen warmest and closest were of his subdued, passionate, portly mother, dead nearly twenty years, and of his father and the family when he was a very small boy called Henry. His father had been a jolly party in those days.

For a week after the coming of the black-bordered letter from England Hal had spent most of his time at the store, which was on week-days almost a solitary retreat; and his ready loud laughter was silenced, and the twinkle dead in his reddish brown eyes.

He had felt no ill-will against anyone for his final cutting off from the family's finances. He had expected that, and he generously agreed with some speaker inside his mind that he had already received more than he was entitled to. Besides, he had indeed done what he had fancied himself possibly doing when Phoebe eloquently commanded his return in Austin: he had flung himself into the management of the plantation, walked for these several

months in the path of all the rectitudes, easily won back at least the indulgent surface affability of all his acquaintances in town and in the country, and was rapidly reëstablishing himself financially.

And then a son and heir—he had been fatuously certain as to the son—had been promised him, to the ex-tramp and ballyhoo man. Moreover, Ida was apparently pleased that he had come back, apparently wished him to stay. So he told himself triumphantly. She hadn't ever lectured or whined or said much of anything when he was playing the fool; she had simply avoided him, burning him with wordless contempt when compelled to be with him. He had had no defense against that faint, furious sneer of hers which could take the heart out of any humor or deviltry of his; and he had then felt her willing him to get out of her sight. But on his last return he had known she was willing him to stay, and though she was dourly penurious as to tenderness in word or act he had been happy to remain and eager to work, his hope centered on the coming event.

Now Bruce stimulated him to frame ambitious new business plans, including ultimately a sawmill on Abancourt Bayou to cut the magnificent pine and cypress timber there; stimulated him also to resolutions on future conduct as splendid as they were repentant and sincere. He chaffed at the delay de-

manded by the wet weather of January and February. He longed to see his land all ridged with long black rows seeded with cotton and corn thrillingly promising a great profit at the end of the year. He impatiently waited for the full tide of spring planting, when he would be busy at the store selling seed, farm equipment, and general supplies.

Yes, Bruce should have such advantages—well, as he deserved. Hal's imagination ran on far ahead, putting the boy in college, starting him in a profession, setting him up in life. He consulted Shep as to the best American preparatory schools and universities, finally agreeing that after all the youngster should have a say as to these matters himself.

Meanwhile the remaining notes against the farm must be lifted, and vast stores of wealth laid up for the coming master of Abancourt Plantation. Besides, Bruce might have brothers and sisters. Who could tell, now? Therefore to work. He raged at the slow passage of time, at the wet weather, the sticky roads; dashing back and forth between the big house and the store, and between Crebillon and the plantation in a light buggy drawn by two horses, all plastered over with gray mud after a round trip.

Brother Shep relapsed into a still, seemingly placid existence that should have been perfectly suited to a student. Every day he went to the house-

boat, explaining to Phoebe that habit made him feel more at home there with his books, and that it was much better for his purpose anyway than the big house now. Going from the breakfast table across the fields in stout boots, he made up a fire in his living-room stove, opened a book, lighted his pipe and sat down. He managed his own midday meals, returning to the big house only at night.

Countless hours of free time lay before him. There were four thick volumes in German, six in French, and eight in English that he had been awaiting the chance to read. They stood on the shelves against the wall still waiting for him.

The room was always warm and dry and cheerful and comfortable whatever the weather outside. And down there in the deep woods no disturbing sound could reach him; all he could hear when he tried was the swish and gurgle of the bayou risen to its winter height, the creak of the ropes holding the boat, the occasional quacking of wild ducks near-by, the lonely slap of a leaping fish on the water, the wind among the cypress and the pines. No monk of Cluny or Citeaux had had so beautiful an opportunity as he had now. So he told himself gloomily. They had had much manual labor to attend to each day, and many prayers; and they wore hair-shirts lest the body be too comfortable.

If he wore a hair-shirt it was invisible: his body was supremely comfortable. And this was the opportunity he had longed for. Phoebe was back, Hal had returned and was in the saddle. And yet he spent hours staring over the black-printed pages, getting nothing from them. Where was his old eagerness and hunger? Some light had dimmed for him, some faint sweet music heard afar had slipped beyond his reach. The wistful old centuries called to him, but he could not go to them now. Shadowy figures he had wanted to know intimately lingered just around the corners of the pages for him, but he could not get to them. To Phoebe asking, with anxiety she could not conceal, how he was making out, he replied, "Oh, pretty well."

But when they should go East next autumn—that move he had finally decided upon—he would surely slip back into the swing of the things he loved; he had been out of the atmosphere too long. So he told himself. Meanwhile he must go through the appropriate motions lest Phoebe be discouraged; so every day he stalked across the fields to the boat, smoked, opened and shut books, wandered in the wet woods on soggy ground, and returned to the big house when darkness fell.

The two families sat together in the evenings; Mrs. Denham crocheting or hand-sewing with silent

intensity; Phoebe entertaining the baby, sometimes even dressing in one of her old polka-dotted clown suits, thinking that thus she might bring to herself a lighter mood; the two husbands playing cards or chess or checkers—burly Hal loud-voiced and gay, slouched easily in his chair, his round shoulders slack; Shep slim, erect, serious, of few words. And they all went to bed early.

There was these days an unnecessary hurried note in Phoebe's footsteps as she flew about the house; unnecessary because in addition to Loretta there were available for housework a tall cream-colored daughter of hers named Shirley and Seneca's stout Airy. There were tiny strained puckerings at the outer corners of Phoebe's blue eyes, a droop of her wide mouth, an unusual gravity in her gallant lifted face.

"Never mind, Phoebe," Shep said as often as he dared, "we'll make another start soon now; I think you'll like it up there in the East."

"Oh, I'm all right, Shepherd. Havin' the time of my life. Restin' an' takin' it easy; I haven't enough to do to keep me out of mischief here. Oh, yes, we'll like it up yonder, I'll be bound. Don't you worry about *me*."

Waiting! Shep and Phoebe waited eagerly for the fresh start that was to achieve a miracle of which

they did not speak, Hal impatiently for the crops to come in and wealth to grow, Mrs. Denham watchfully for what might befall.

Spring marched in bannered with white and pink and pale soft green, summer followed with a vast deep rich green. Bruce graduated from long trailing dresses, drank mightily from a bottle, and grew fine black hair on his round high head. His eyes were definitely gray with unusually distended pupils.

During July and August Shep frankly gave up all pretense of study; he must be rested for the third start, he explained to Phoebe, especially as he hoped to win during his first year some small teaching position under the new history chief in the East. There was money for two or three years even if he made nothing, but it would be well to gather all they could, wasn't it, Phoebe? No one could tell what might happen. Maybe they might even go abroad, to Oxford or the Sorbonne. Wouldn't Phoebe like that? Aye, Lordy, she would for a fact.

In the early part of August Hal's energy suddenly died out. He stopped visiting the negro tenants to heckle and jolly them into twelve-hour laboring days during cotton-picking time, shut down the gin saying it was broken and couldn't be put in repair until the next season, stopped going to town, almost stopped coming to meals at the big

house. He was a recluse in the store, snatching breakfast before the others were up, sending for his dinners and eating supper out of tin cans and the crackerbox; giving as excuse when Phoebe questioned him that he was very busy, though she could see he wasn't. Then he began drinking in a way new for him; drinking alone.

He had planted cotton on the thirty-acre tract held out for the master's own special field, working it himself. It was now a great stretch of black stalks dotted thickly with white, ready for the first picking, in danger of being washed out by rain, and beaten and soiled on the ground. He made no effort to pick it himself or to hire help to gather it; and Shep, idle and waiting impatiently for the flight eastward in September, flung himself at the job, glad of the opportunity to use his hands and legs. Phoebe often went with him, picking a while in feverish haste and then resting in a fence corner, watching the tall Shep in striped cotton shirt and pinkish jeans trousers move steadily up and down the rows dragging a long sack with him by a strap across his shoulder, his two hands swiftly picking the fluffy cotton out of the dry cracked bolls and shoving it into the bag.

One afternoon late in August Hal sat on a stool behind a counter in the store, his head propped up

on his hands, his reddish brown eyes restlessly moving about the small wooden building. A clock on a shelf behind him ticked with unnatural loudness in the summer stillness, the hands pointing at five minutes past two. Except for him the place was deserted; not a half-dozen people had been in all day. Farmers were busy getting in their precious cotton—their only considerable crop from which they realized actual cash; they visited country stores only when they had to, and then chose hours after dark. Ordinarily Hal would have closed the store until then in order to do other work about the plantation.

Finally he rose, walked with stiff precision to the front door, as if he were trying to move along lines and angles while some hostile sneering person watched him, and closed that end of the house. Pulling a flat flask from his right hip pocket, he drank, made a face, shoved the bottle back in his pocket, and returned stiffly to his stool.

Beads of sweat stood on his forehead, his grizzling brown hair was a tangled mass darkened by the dampness in it. He rubbed his right hand over his left forearm, bare to the elbow, and then his left hand over his thick right forearm, flattening the matted reddish hairs against his white skin. He struck viciously at flies buzzing about his head.

Presently, bowing his head several times as if he

had at last come to some momentous decision, he walked out of the back door and made his way cautiously through trees and bushes to the side of the front-yard fence. He pulled off three palings, sneaked through the hole and stole with elaborate care to the long porch. There on the shady end of it was the baby, asleep on a pallet inside an improvised miniature fence. Loretta's Shirley would be down at her mother's house for her usual afternoon hour off. Ida would be just inside the French window sewing or reading, or more likely taking a nap since the weather was so hot. He knew the schedule.

Removing his shoes, he mounted the steps and tiptoed to Bruce's little fence. Looking through an open window, Hal saw his wife lying on the old horsehair sofa, her head and shoulders covered with a newspaper to guard against the botheration of an occasional fly. Listening, he could hear her steadily breathing, and the end of the paper across her bosom rose and fell regularly with tiny cracklings. Bowing his head up and down with vast solemnity, Hal stuck the nippled milk bottle in his left pocket, lifted the small sleeper in his arms, got down the steps, and, forgetting his shoes in his haste, hurried back to the store. He laid Bruce on the counter, and set himself again on his stool behind it.

The baby presently opened his eyes, squared his

mouth and swiftly contorted his soft countenance into something monstrous, preparing elaborately to do some crying; but Hal knew how to astonish and interest him. Bruce began laughing with quick gurgling intakes of breath, making motions with his small curved hands as if he would applaud lustily if only he could get them to come flatly together. Setting him up with his back against the end of a showcase full of candy, Hal put into his eager hands the milk bottle. The baby raised it to his mouth and drank long, keeping his twinkling big-pupiled gray eyes on the stout comical party in front of him.

Hal pulled his own flask from the other hip pocket, touched it to Bruce's. "Here's looking at you, old top!"

The baby drank on, and then letting the bottle slide into his lap tried to applaud again, his face suddenly shining with gay smiles.

"That's right, laugh at me," moaned Hal, sudden alcoholic tears in his eye. "Give me the horse-laugh; others will soon be doing the same. But I deserve them. Who am I? Why, a drunken bum, a tramp, a vag, a bad-egg man for fair. Yes, and who are you that laughs at me? Why, you're a poor little bastard that doesn't know it, and probably never will know it. But I know what *I* am, they can't fool old Hal. Let the huzzy sneer and slide her

black eyes about; she needn't hint at me, I *know*."

He waited a moment, waggling his big head up and down. "By God, I *know*. What's she up to now, Bruce, with her faint sneers and innuendoes? Could you tell me? You're with her a great deal. Don't you know what she's up to?"

The baby grabbed up his bottle, and Hal took it away from him.

"Here, Bruce, don't drink that pap. I'll spike your stuff, then we'll forget all our troubles together."

He twisted off the top, poured a small quantity of whisky into the milk, spilling much more on the counter, put on the top again and gravely put the round bottle into the baby's eagerly grasping hands. Bruce drank deep and often.

"Go to it, my lad—it'll make you forget what you are. Poor little bottle-fed tike! She ought to have suckled you herself, as my mother did me. But she's afraid it might soften and spoil her snow-white breasts that stand so straight. She's as stingy with them to you, Bruce, as she ever was with me. Damn her!

"Yes, yes, now laugh again, you silly little bastard. You've got no more sense than your father. I'd crock him if it wasn't for Phoebe. *She's* a good fellow, Bruce. I'll tell you, I wouldn't do anything

to spoil the little clown's plans or to hurt her for the world. If it weren't for her though I'd bash that long-legged husband of hers. By God, I would! And yet, Bruce, he was probably tolled along, as Phoebe would say, until he didn't know which end of him was up.

"Drink, old top; it'll kill care, and the earlier you begin killing that the better off you are. Give me your bottle, I'll spike it again; cow-milk will give you no dreams. Bruce, my lad, you'll be bawling around here like a calf if you keep on with that stuff. There, now, you've got something that'll make your hair grow, and you could do with a good deal more hair, my lad." Hal laughed, and the baby smiled radiantly at him.

"Bruce, listen; I'll whisper what I've got in my head. They think old Hal's a fool, but he'll show 'em a thing or two yet. I'm lying low till Phoebe gets Shep away. Then you watch *me!* No, I wouldn't do *anything* to hurt the Little Elizabethan, she's a true penny if ever there was one. Why couldn't I have got one like her! Let her get Shep away, then Ida can go to her sour old father's little hole-in-the-wall shop, or she can go to the devil. I don't care, but I'll be moving on. Don't you see, Bruce, if I start anything now, Shep will stick around? He's such a chivalric gentleman, the damned prig!

Brother Shep and his conscience! No, let him go, let him get far away so there's little likelihood of his rushing back; then my time's come.

"Look sharp there, my lad! Are you losing your head already? There, take your bottle again. Can't you hold it? Have some more—the hair of the dog that bit you, Bruce. That's right, hit her up, and I'll do the same."

Hal emptied his flask and dropped it on the floor. Putting his head in his hands on the counter, he cried and moaned and cursed, twisting his shoulders about as if he were in agony; and after a while he lay still. Flies crawled over his sweat-beaded neck, but he didn't strike at them now.

The baby's face was mottled purplish red, and he wavered back and forth. The bottle slid out of his hands into his lap. He tried to beat his dimpled fists together. His face suddenly paled to a chalky white. He leaned forward once, and caught himself. He leaned again, fell forward on his face, and rolled off the counter, carrying the milk bottle with him. It struck a plowshare standing near, smashed into many small pieces; and the baby writhed about in the broken glass. His curved little hands, usually as delicately pink as the inside of a sea-shell, were soon bright red with flowing blood; and his face was a gory mask.

He sat up a moment, trying to cry, but he could make no sound. His time for crawling had come recently and he made a valiant effort in the direction of the open back door, attracted by the light; but he was too sick and weak to move more than a few inches, and after a halt, a wavering moment, he toppled over on his side. Then the store flies took him. He moved no more.

Hal snored loudly, groaning now and then, muttering, "Poor little bastard!" The clock on the shelf behind him ticked on, the hands standing at two-thirty. The leaky faucet of a vinegar barrel drip-dropped into a tin measure under it. A big gray spider swung down to the edge of the counter near Hal's head, moored a thread there, ran up to the low ceiling again, dropped once more, weaving a web to catch the flies in. A red hound looked in at the back door, came in tentatively, walked to the baby, smelled him and turned away; then seeing Hal's head he ran out. A little later an old white sow scuffled in, went grunting about here and there, found the baby, rooted him over on his face with her soiled snout, left him, found a pile of bacon-sides, and began eating on one of them.

Up at the big house Mrs. Denham slept on. Down in Loretta's cabin Shirley combed out her hair, tied its many upstanding knots with colored rags, and

watched the hands of the clock moving toward three, when she must be a nurse-girl again. Out in the field Shep trudged back and forth in the glaring sun, picking cotton steadily, his mind busy with his plans for the future work in the East. Phoebe sat against a small tree in a fence corner, her mind also on the promising East, her blue eyes looking as if across vast stretches of time and down long beautiful vistas.

Trees and bushes hung lifeless leaves in the windless air. No bird flew or sang, no voice of shouting negroes came across the field, no dog barked. The drooping, wilting stillness of a hot mid-afternoon was everywhere.

At five minutes after three fourteen-year-old Shirley looked finally at herself in the bumpy mirror, called to her mother, "I'm gone," and dashed up to the big house; and ten minutes later Mrs. Denham, having seen Hal's shoes by the front steps, was running down the inclined ground to the store, Shirley behind cowed into silence. The old white sow, hearing the noise at the back door and thinking herself trapped, rushed toward the light grunting fiercely and gnashing her teeth, frothing at the mouth, trampling the baby's clothes as she passed.

Shirley fell back in terror. Mrs. Denham went on inside, the hog dashing by her and out of the door.

Stooping and lifting Bruce into her arms, she held him hard against her, her eyes closed; and then she stood up and looked at Hal. Mixed now with the heavy conglomerate store odor was the keen smell of alcohol. Hal snored on. The baby lay a soft limp burden in his mother's arms.

Holding her eyes away from the bloody child, holding them high and straight ahead, Ida Denham walked out of the store. The negro girl came to her, but seeing her face went running home as fast as she could go, whimpering as if she had been beaten.

Not hesitating, Mrs. Denham moved down the sloping ground, moved out into the fields, slowly climbed four cross-fences, and came to the field where Shep was. He was at the end of a row emptying his bag upon a small white mountain of picked cotton on the ground. He saw Phoebe jump up and go tearing through the dried cotton stalks, saw Mrs. Denham turn her shoulder as if to ward her off, saw the mother coming on straight to him, her eyes on his face. Phoebe followed behind.

Chills ran up and down his backbone, his scalp tingled, his heart swelled and thumped, and for a moment he could see nothing before him. And then the baby was in his arms, and Mrs. Denham was looking at him, and so was Phoebe.

"Hal killed him. He's at the store." The mother's words were heavy and flat, stone dropping upon stone. She waited, her eyes on his face.

Holding Bruce in his left arm, Shep tore at his shirt collar, already open. Then he stared down at the baby, touching him fearfully with the tips of his fingers.

"I didn't know, Ida. I didn't know."

"Hal killed him. He's at the store."

She held out her hands, and he placed the baby in them, and started across the field. Mrs. Denham stood still. Phoebe ran after him. She seized his left arm, calling, "Shep! Shep!" He threw her off, and stalked on through the dried cotton stalks.

She flung her arms around his waist, and let her body fall to halt him with her weight. He went on, dragging her along the ground; and then, not looking at her, he bent down and pulled her hands apart, and she fell, calling, "Shep, you mustn't go there. You mustn't do *that.* Hal's drunk, he *can't* fight."

He stopped, turned around, picked her up, and held her in his arms.

"Tell me what to do, Phoebe. I'm crazy."

His voice was not loud; it was very low, and he talked as if he didn't quite see her. Taking off his glasses, he kept wiping his left hand across his eyes,

as if to clear away some stubbornly sticky cobweb there. "Tell me what to do, Phoebe."

"Go to the stable, saddle a horse an' ride like hell to town for a doctor. Don't come back without one. Go! Will you do it, Shep? Answer me? Will you do it—go to town for a doctor?"

"I'll do it."

She walked behind him, and when she had seen him gallop down the road she returned to Mrs. Denham and maneuvered her to the house into the care of Loretta, and took the baby herself.

The moment she touched him Phoebe knew he was alive. She stripped and washed him, and put him to bed. Recovering consciousness presently, he vomited stoutly, and when Shep came back with the doctor Bruce was sound asleep in his mother's arms. Phoebe was down at the store standing guard over the still stupefied Hal.

By ten o'clock the big house was as quiet as usual. The doctor had gone, knowing only that Bruce had fallen off a counter at the store and cut himself with pieces of the broken milk bottle. He said the wounds were slight and not at all dangerous. Bruce and his mother were in bed in that room which had belonged to Shep's mother, to his Granny Jeanne, to his wife Phoebe. Hal snored on the ancient horsehair sofa

in the living-room adjoining, two weeks' growth of grizzled-gray beard on his plump face. Shep sat in a rocking chair before the screened fireplace, Phoebe in another near-by, her eyes closed, her head leaning back, her hands in her lap.

Taking off his shoes with tremulous caution lest he wake her, Shep stole across the hall to their bedroom, brought back two light cotton quilts, flung one over Hal, and carefully covered the Little Elizabethan with the other, tucking it around her feet and under her legs. Then he blew out the lamp and sat down to see the night through.

The night was dark and still. He was tired. Outside the katydids swung back and forth, back and forth, their monotonous lulling song. But he did not sleep. After a while a rooster crowed, then another some distance away, and another very far away; lonely piercing sounds that stabbed him. The clock ticked with inexorable brutal regularity, and he sat listening intently to it; time dropping away, and his life.

Shortly after three, through the darkness, he heard Phoebe's voice; flat, lifeless; low, he thought, so as not to wake Hal; unblurred by any hint of sleep. She too had been awake all these long hours.

"Shepherd, you've got to stand by Bruce—it might be serious next time."

"Yes, but I've got to stand by you too, Phoebe."

"Never mind me. He's helpless. He'll *need* you. And now I think I'll go to bed."

Feeling her near him, he reached out and caught hold of her dress as she was moving away. He found her hand, and pulled her back. Standing up, he put his arm around her shoulder in that old comradely gesture of the days when they were boy and girl together; and she remembered it, and in the blackness about them she held both hands hard against her mouth, and was glad that it was dark.

"Phoebe, don't, *please!*"

He heard her tiptoeing across the room, across the hall, then a door shut to softly. He started after her, halted, came back and stood by a window looking out into the night, seeing nothing. It was over an hour before the east lightened, though it seemed but a few minutes to him; and then he sat down to await with slow fury the new day that should see Hal sober.

· XVII ·

Men, Pistols, and a Hen

The daily routine of life is almost invincible. Loretta comes in shortly after daybreak, makes the usual amount of noise starting a fire in the kitchen stove, goes down to the cattle-yard and milks the cows, and returning cooks breakfast and rings the big brass handbell. The two families gather about the table. Even Bruce sits in his gaily painted high chair, which Hal has long ago brought home with such joyous expectancy; long ago because the proud bag-egg man couldn't wait until the baby actually needed it. And now Mrs. Denham wants to keep Bruce constantly in her sight.

Breakfast is ordinarily the most silent meal of the day, but this breakfast is intensely still. Hal, at the head of the table, keeps his heavy bloodshot eyes on his plate; except that now and then he glances appealingly at Phoebe, or with wistful remorseful sorrow at the scarred little fellow he has compelled to be his drinking companion. Shep has told him, in quick quiet strained words, what has happened.

Usually these days Hal would have snatched something in the kitchen and retreated to the store; he has waked this morning too late for retreat, and besides he is now in no mood for retreat. He will face the situation out.

Mrs. Denham sits at the other end of the rectangular table, pink and white and disdainful; Shep at one side, eating mechanically, his eyes restlessly roving about; Phoebe on the other side, near Bruce, her wide-eyed kitten face drawn and gray, lifting and shaking her head from time to time as if to throw back a great lot of hair.

Loretta, coming in with hot biscuit or merely to stand around in case she is wanted, exercises the Southern family servant's traditional license of speech. She tries to start talk about the price of cotton—the universal topic in this section at this season. Then she tries banter with silent Mr. Hal. At that Mrs. Denham draws down her mouth, blazes at her with black eyes, and Loretta, shrugging her shoulders, goes back to the kitchen, slamming the door.

Presently Hal rises, Shep looks meaningly up at him, Hal nods his head, and all leave the dining-room one by one; Hal going down to the store, Shep out across the fields, Mrs. Denham, carrying Bruce, to her living-room, Phoebe to her bedroom, where

the day before she has finally begun packing for the trip East the following week.

There is little packing left for her to do now. She has kept out a few things of hers and Shep's to mend before the new start in life. Taking from a drawer a new pajama coat of his that needs a button or so, she sits down with it by a window, threads a needle and begins by habit this trivial work, moved by an impulse a day old, stopping frequently to gaze out before her.

She hears Shirley arrive to take charge of the baby, Seneca's Airy on the other side of the hall making up a bed and then sweeping, the far-away singing of negroes picking cotton, old songs from slavery times with secret wailing in them though the words have jolly faces enough. They will soon be quiet, she knows, and will sing no more until the late afternoon, coming home, and then they will be happier, for the day's work will be done. To-morrow will not worry them.

Phoebe's hands drop in her lap, and she sits a long time staring out across the sun-flooded fields. To-morrow will not worry *them.* She catches her lower lip under her teeth, lifts her face, shakes her head, and goes on sewing.

After a while she sees Hal pass southward, giving the big house a wide berth as if he doesn't want

to be noticed there. Hurrying out on the back porch, she watches him enter the stable, some two hundred yards away. That is all right; she has feared he might be on his way to the house-boat. She sits on the kitchen steps to make sure that, coming out of the stable, he returns to the store or the house.

Presently she hears a hen cackling wildly in the loft of the stable as if she has just seen a beautiful miracle or a terrifying horror. Then an old fat Plymouth Rock comes tearing out into the sun and on up into the back yard, her neck stretched forward, her wings extended, splitting the air with squawks. Other hens join in the clamor, and two roosters rush officiously to assist her in making noise, turning their heads sidewise and looking up to see if a hawk has alarmed the portly sister. The excitement dies down quickly; after a few minutes they are picking around quietly in the yard.

Phoebe recalls her and Shep's frightened hiding in the loft when they thought the sheriff and Cesar Honfleur were after them, empowered to arrest and jail them; their night sleeping on the sweet-smelling fodder awaiting the morning for a dash to the woods and liberty; Shep's trial—so they had both felt it to be, in their simplicity—and his standing up so tall and straight and telling the tempestuous Cesar that he will marry her in a minute if she'll have him.

Shepherd! She breathes the name over and over, sitting there on the steps in the sun, her head in her hands.

It gets through finally to her consciousness that there is an unusual thumping and bumping in the loft of the stable, whence the old hen has fled. They are only dull dim sounds, so she walks but slowly down the sloping, grassless, white ground toward the cattle-yard. What in the *world* is Hal doing up there? From the noise he is making he might be in desperate battle with the devil. So she says to herself, a haggard little smile on her lips at the thought. He is like herself, he works in feverish spells, and he is probably making an ambitious beginning this morning by repairing the old stable.

Opening the gate, she goes nearer to it, and looks up. Through the cracks dust puffs out now and then. Something is flung against the shuttered loft window. She sees the hinged panel bulge out, straining at the rope tying it on the outside. Loose floor-boards in the loft rattle. Feet trample about. There is a heavy bumping on the walls at several points. Coming closer and listening hard, Phoebe hears loud tortured breathing.

"Hal!" she calls, and starts quickly to the door.

Something is flung against the closed shutter again, it strains open a few inches, she catches a

glimpse of an agonized red face, the shutter breaks open, and two figures, clinched, drop out, strike a big grindstone standing by the wall, fall apart, tumble to the ground, lie still, the sun bringing out to Phoebe's terrified eyes every detail of their tattered shirts and bleeding faces.

Loretta, Seneca's Airy and Shirley are near, and the four get the two men into the house, and Phoebe rides a horse to town for the doctor, unwilling to call in men from the field to witness this shame.

Within a month the two men are in wheeled chairs; Shep with a broken leg, Hal with a twisted backbone. Shep will walk with his feet again, Hal never. Possibly with crutches the bad-egg man may get about a little, in time. So says the doctor. The "Crebillon Courier" reports that Mr. Shepherd D. Tideboy and Mr. Haliburton H. Denham, while out riding in a buggy, "had the misfortune to have their team run away, Mr. Tideboy sustaining a double fracture of the right leg below the knee, Mr. Denham a dislocation of the lower vertebræ." So Phoebe has explained the situation to the doctor, and he to the weekly newspaper.

Loretta, Shirley, and Seneca's Airy know there has been no runaway, but them she pledges to silence. Cesar Honfleur rushes out, looks around suspiciously, lectures Shep vaguely but furiously, and

returns to town the same day. Mrs. Pilduff comes out in a livery-stable buggy, stays a week to nurse, and goes back, her great, white moon-face full of anxiety. Leaving, she kisses Phoebe for the first time —Mrs. Pilduff doesn't believe in kissing generally —holding the Little Elizabethan against her ample breast, patting her shoulder, saying nothing.

Phoebe unpacks the trunks. The promising East is lost to her and Shep; at least for some months, probably forever. So she feels. What lies ahead she cannot see. Shep will need her for a while. And after that? She doesn't know. She asks no questions, exacts no promises, delivers no lectures, gives no advice, utters no complaint. Such is Hooker Dibble's daughter from the Arkansas Mountains.

Every morning she helps him to dress and pushes him out on the back porch; on the front porch will be Hal, and Shep refuses to sit anywhere near the bad-egg man. She supplies Shep with books, and sits near him most of the day and at night until bedtime, in case he should want her to do something for him. They talk little—about the crops, the price of cotton, the weather; old rags of talk laboriously woven to cover something up.

Mrs. Denham assuming the management of things discharges Shirley and Seneca's Airy, for reasons of economy; and herself takes charge of

the store. Usually she carries Bruce with her whenever she leaves the big house, but sometimes she rolls his buggy to the side of Shep's wheeled chair, so that he can watch over him; she never again permits Hal to touch him.

Every morning early Loretta pushes Hal to the front porch. On a tray she brings him his meals. She and Phoebe give him all the attention he has from those in the big house. Phoebe often stays with him, always when Bruce is with Shep; she sitting on the edge of the porch, her feet dangling over, her head against one of the dignified old Doric columns. They talk about Papa Dooin, Challifer who was forever looking for a proper location for his chicken farm, the hypochondriac Wild Man of Madagascar, alias Amos Simmons, and many others of the circus people. They read to each other letters received from their comrades of the big top.

She tells Hal of her father and of their days on the road, in which he shows a sudden keen interest, asking many eager questions about how Hooker Dibble made a living; and she pictures for him "Professor" Hugo Williger, his two red-haired banjo-picking daughters, and that ambitious automobile medicine show. Sometimes they laugh aloud —it is easy to laugh with Hal even while condemning him—and Shep, hearing them, is sick with mor-

bid melancholy; and Mrs. Denham, hearing them, draws down her red lips at the corners, on her pink-and-white face that faint furious sneer so dreaded by Hal.

But he sees little of Ida or her face these days. He is the prisoner of a chair by day, sleeping by night on the horsehair sofa in the living-room, to which Loretta helps him every night before leaving for home. He doesn't smoke, cares nothing for reading, and dismal boredom is his most frequent companion.

Now he exercises his full powers of charming upon all who come near him, hoping thus to make them remain to laugh and talk. Old Tackaberry, who has another school further away than his first one, sometimes walks the eight miles to spend Saturday and Sunday with the bad-egg man. He will chat a while with Shep, his one-time pupil, but he has obviously come to see Hal. The negroes of the plantation, neighbors black and white on their way to and from the store or Crebillon, traveling chicken-wagon families, itinerant medicine shows in wagons, anybody that will join him in "pleasant converse," as he phrases it, all these Hal welcomes and holds as long as he can. He can spend an hour happily with an eight-year-old negro boy beckoned in from the road.

Never was he so popular, and the other prisoner of a chair cannot escape a fretting jealousy. These promiscuous people respect Shep, they love the bad-egg man. Loretta pampers him; not only saving out the choicest items of her cooking for his tray but slipping out to him between meals with sandwiches, slabs of pie, and freshly made cake. And sitting still, eating often merely to pass the time, he begins taking on fat at a prodigious rate.

But for all his companionship, volunteered and dragooned, Hal soon knows intimately boredom gloomy and dreadful. There are seven slow days in every week, twenty-four long hours in each day; and the parish is not yet thickly populated despite Cesar Honfleur's glowing prediction, of many years standing, that great numbers of people were about to settle among them; so that Hal's powers of attraction, splendid though they are, fill comparatively little of his vast leisure.

When humans fail he tries to charm all the animals that come near to stay with him. Stray flop-eared hounds he will whistle in and fondle and feed. Pigeons sit on his shoulders. Becky, an old hen, speckled black and white, visits him regularly to pick crumbs off the floor and off him, to receive bits of bread he has saved for her, to sit in his lap while he strokes her feathers, turning her head sidewise

and looking up at him wonderingly with a red-rimmed eye.

The prospect before Hal is terrifying enough—the helpless husband of a hating wife. His mind plays with plans of escape, but he puts them aside; all that he can think of requires considerable powers of locomotion; of which he now has none, of which he can never have much.

Meanwhile he is always casting about for new means of speeding time. On a corner of his chair hangs a bag stuffed with metal ring-puzzles, pieces of soft white pine for whittling, a deck of cards, and two pistols, which he has commanded a negro to bring up from the store, Mrs. Denham silently assenting. He laboriously takes apart the rings of the puzzles, mixes them together, untangles them over and over again. He plays solitaire, and with infinite pains whittles out boats, windmills, and comical animals, sending them by Phoebe as remorseful peace-offerings to the little fellow he once hurt. Bruce's mother promptly throws them all into the fire, but Phoebe never tells him of that.

With as many cartridges as Mrs. Denham will permit him to have he blazes away at a target on a tree in a corner of the yard, now with one pistol, now with both. Ida begrudges him the cartridges, he tells

Phoebe with a grin, now that she has given up hope of his using the pistols upon himself, but he will have cartridges or he will raise a row.

One afternoon in October he sits on the front porch at a loss for something to do. He sees no one out on the public road to beckon in. Loretta is at home between dinner and supper, Mrs. Denham at the store with Bruce, Shep dozing on the back porch, the little clown gone across the fields to the house-boat. Not with any definite purpose is Phoebe there; she often goes to it these days, makes up a fire in the stove and sits by herself, doing nothing, seeing nothing, almost unconscious of where she is.

Hal has worked his puzzles, done as much target practice as he usually indulges in, played solitaire until he is sick of the look of the rusty red-backed cards, whittled until the floor about him is littered with shavings. Ordinarily at this time of the still warm October afternoon he is napping in his chair, but he can't sleep this day. The house, the yard, the plantation are intensely still. Hal suddenly snatches both his big-calibered pistols out of his bag and bangs away at the target, the fusillade of twelve shots shattering the silence about him.

The sleeping Shep jumps, hurts his leg, curses his too popular enemy, and with a face of black fury

wheels his chair rapidly through the wide central hall and out on the front porch.

"Hello, Brother Shep! Come to make friends?" Hal smiles genially at him, and then noticing his face reloads both pistols and holds one out toward him, his own fat grizzled face keeping its smile.

"As good a way as any, Shep. Come on, if you're not afraid."

The chair at the door moves to Hal's end of the porch, a long lean white hand takes the offered blue pistol, and the chair begins backing away toward the other end of the porch.

"Don't go too far, Shep, or the kick of the thing will roll you off the other end. Ida's little clock will soon be striking three in there; I know because the sun is now near that knot-hole in the floor. God, *that's* the kind of thing I'm getting to be interested in these days! When the clock stops striking, Shep, start shooting. Keep on shooting, Shep, because I will. I know you *used* to be a good shot with anything; I can do pretty well with one of these now. Are you ready?"

"Yes."

Imperceptibly the sun edges toward the knot-hole. Hal's old speckled hen starts mounting the steps, slowly and fearfully, one step at a time, cran-

ing her neck to look at the two still figures on the porch. She is accustomed to the fat one, but that slim white-faced one in the second chair is no proved friend of hers, and she is ill at ease. Finally she gains the porch, starts toward her friend, halting frequently with one clinched foot raised against her body.

"Shooey, Becky, you blessed old fool, you!"

Hal raises his pistol to wave her away, the clock strikes three quick strokes, Shep fires once. And waits. Becky flies off the porch with a squawk.

"Now we'll start all over again, Shep. She always gets up in my lap, and I was afraid you might hit *her*. You never touched me. Do you want a new cartridge? No? Well, then, I'll take out one of mine. The clock will strike once for the quarter-hour soon. Then go to it. I'll get you if you don't."

They wait again, Shep strained forward, his free hand gripping the side of his chair, his jaw set, his face bloodless; Hal sitting easily, his left hand stroking his shaggy, grizzled gray beard.

And Phoebe, coming through the hall from the back, walks out on the porch, looks from one to the other of them, and wheels Shep swiftly to his bedroom. Taking the pistol out of his unresisting hand, she rushes out, locking the door behind her; and re-

turning to the front porch takes Hal's. She has said no word, nor have they. She steals to one of the unused upstairs rooms, hides the pistols in a closet, suddenly falls in a huddled heap in a corner of it, her hands over her eyes. At supper time Loretta finds her there.

· XVIII ·

Phoebe Keeps the Faith

And now the Little Elizabethan is a prisoner in the house with the two husbands. She can't leave them alone again. They'd fight with butcher-knives, she fears, billets of woods, anything. She tells Mrs. Denham nothing of the wheeled-chair duel. She has few words on any subject whatsoever with that small, hard, busy, beautiful woman, now suddenly concentrated on the business side of the plantation and managing it extremely well.

Where is all this to end? Phoebe can't see the end, she will ask no questions. By December Shep is on his feet, unsteadily, with crutches, but getting rapidly back to normal. Hal's tiny drinking companion has lost all the dark evidences of their debauch in the store, his pink-and-white face without a scar. The bad-egg man drinks no more; he couldn't if he wished, for Ida Denham gives him no money with which to bribe negroes to bring it to him. Hal is too helpless now to be a menace to Bruce; will always be too helpless. So Phoebe argues to herself.

Besides, Ida Denham has had warning enough to keep the two apart. That shouldn't be difficult, considering Hal's condition. The little clown waits for a word from Shep as to their future.

Now she would go anywhere with him, and in any way; but now she *must* go, somehow, somewhere. That she knows. She can in no wise live in an atmosphere of doubt and sneers and hatred. The doubt is hers; she waits for Shep to speak. To the East—preferably to the East, because it is far away—she will gladly go if he will only suggest it, trying to revive their splendid old plan, perhaps killed that afternoon in August; or to a medical school and then out on the road in a wagon, he as a wandering medicine man; even to another plantation if he wants to continue farming, which she can't believe, if only the plantation be miles away from this one.

She waits for Shep to speak. At night she helps him undress, puts him to bed, lies by his side in the dark, her eyes wide open, her muscles tight, waiting for a word as to their future together, if they are to be together. Though he has always been shy and quiet and unboastful, yet in the old times, lying by her side at night, he would talk of ambitious plans that seemed too secret and too shining to show by day.

And now she welcomes each day the coming dark-

ness, hoping that in the thin still hours after midnight, shut away from all alien influence, he will speak his choice. He is at all times as respectful to her as when they were boy and girl together. He is, she sees, sick with remorse for the past. She wants to know only of the future; only that, the past may go. She will meet him more than half-way, but he must make the start, now.

Night after night she lies there on her back, her eyes staring up; staring up and seeing nothing even when the moonlight floods the room; waiting.

She remembers especially one moonless night of blowing weather in that December, and she asking herself over and over again, "Is it shabby an' mean of me to hope he'll choose me, an' not the baby?" If Bruce were still in danger from Hal she wouldn't hesitate. Didn't she tell Shep to stand by Bruce when she feared harm might come to him from poor old Hal irresponsible in his cups? Yes, she did, and she meant it too. Now Hal can't hurt anybody. Aye, Lordy, the poor old fat cripple will himself be butchered to pieces in his spirit before he dies; tortured by that sneering little black-eyed hell-cat until all his humor and all his courage have been bled out of him, and he is a mealy-mouthed whining beggar asking only for something to eat.

Hal hurt Bruce? Ida will probably teach Bruce

to assist her, in his innocence, in torturing Hal. So Phoebe argues passionately and without a sound, lying there in bed, the December wind howling about the big house; and Shep within a foot of her, silent, as sleepless as she, as well she knows.

Her thoughts pile up, like driftwood against a dam when the bayou rages in a winter flood. As to Shep, is she afraid of Ida Denham? Is it the woman, and not the baby? She rolls her head back and forth on the pillow. Shep doesn't love Ida. Frightened of her, yes, but not in love with her; dislikes her even. That Phoebe knows; she couldn't be near those two persons day after day and not be certain as to that. So she tells herself with wistful passion, and is almost convinced; not quite.

Love is in the air; a fool can feel it, trace it, mark them it touches and thrills and flutters and colors, beyond all doubt whatsoever. What happened that spring nearly two years ago now she can in no way picture, she has shamelessly tried a thousand times; but surely it was no more than a thing of lust, engineered by Ida; a mad fever, burning out quickly, now gone utterly. She has known of these matters on the road. Gone utterly? God! if she could only believe it!

But put Ida out of the question. What then? Phoebe's powerful enemy is that precious little pink-

and-white innocent with the laughing gray eyes and the small curved hands. All the more powerful because him she must not, cannot fight. She catches her lip under her teeth, thinking of her three old dolls with the faded dresses. "Bruce, Bruce, I'll not *cheat* you!" Her heart stops, it almost seems as if she has shrieked up into the old blackness above her.

She *could* play upon Shep if she chose. She knows how—what every woman knows. She has done so, done it often. She has lured him into her arms many a time before: to give her hope, to rescue him from attacks of discouragement, to verify her power over him, or merely for breathless physical ecstasy; and in the slack, unguarded expansive after-moments, she knows he would promise anything. Especially if she should cry a little, and God knows *that* would be easy now. Yes, she can pledge Shep to-night, now. She has only to reach out her arms, touching him, and the beginning is made. But she will *not* cheat the little innocent across the hall. *He* has no tricks as yet, and she will have none, this night or any other night, until a decision is fairly made.

There Bruce is, and here she is. Shep will choose. Shep must choose. She needn't tell Shep she loves him, and will love him, she is certain, whatever has

happened or may happen, so long as love is possible to her. She needn't tell him she is his wife again and as long as he wishes, if he decides for her. All that is surely clear to him. He will choose. She is waiting.

Listening, she marks his breathing. He isn't asleep, hasn't been asleep since they lay down. The clock struck two a while ago. The wind is still rising, whistling and moaning around the corners of the old house, flinging about the great long limbs of the pines in the front yard so violently that one must have been thrown over on another, for she hears them groaning under the stormy friction.

Is she being fair to herself? After all, Ida is energetic, clear-headed, knows her way about. She and Hal could have the big house, the plantation, the store, the grist mill, the gin all free and clear; they could get along with them easily, and Bruce couldn't suffer for lack of food and clothes and a home. Ida loves him, there is no mistaking that; he couldn't suffer for lack of attention and affection.

Is she being fair to herself? Phoebe is cold, lonesome, heartsick, there in the bed, in the winter darkness, by the side of the man she loves more than life, less than honesty. If she but whisper "Shep," touching him with her hand . . .

She lies still, the muscles of her body strained, her

hands clinched, her teeth biting her lip. So the night passes, and many another like it. She is waiting. But Phoebe will keep the faith with the little enemy across the hall.

· XIX ·

Two Hands That Speak

CHRISTMAS comes, cold and wet and cheerless; almost giftless as to the inmates of the big house among themselves. Shep, keeping up tradition, sends things to all the negroes on the place; Phoebe, driven by conscience, loads her innocent small enemy; Hal hurries Pompey to town with a long list, something for everybody, even Shep, who pretends not to see the fancy necktie, though it is so loud he can almost hear it. Hal relies on the moneyed Ida to pay the bill. But he doesn't worry about that; Hal wouldn't. She gives little, and that little from the store, at wholesale prices. Hal tells Phoebe, with a grin and a hearty laugh, that the "old girl" comes of a penny-biting stock.

Loretta, struggling to capture the Christmas spirit in the big house, surrenders, shrugs her still handsome shoulders, and does her cooking and serving perfunctorily as for any week-day of any old month.

Only Hal makes resolutions at New Year's, and he makes but three, confiding them to Phoebe out

on the front porch, where he spends most of the day despite the cold in order to beckon at anyone passing to come in for a talk. Hal pulls his fuzzy old gray steamer-cap down over his eyes and swears that he will never again, so help him God, touch anything alcoholic in the slightest degree; that he will stop eating so much and thus reduce his terrifying weight; and that he will, when warm weather comes, remove himself from the vicinity of a certain faintly sneering person, if only it be to a hole in the ground.

"Mark my words, Phoebe; and if I don't make them good call me liar and coward. Look, I can do about a little with these new crutches. My right leg is as dead as a herring, but I can stand some weight on my left—enough to manage a step or so with the crutches; and when I've taken off twenty pounds, and my leg is stronger, I can do better yet. Look, Phoebe!"

And he does contrive a half-dozen steps, slowly, haltingly, with her help.

February comes with a hint of Southern spring, and late in that month fruit trees are flaming pink and white in the orchard. Hal confides his excitement to the sad little clown. But then Bruce falls sick, and the bad-egg man forgets his deep plans for escape; thinking continuously and asking re-

peatedly about "the small party," whom he sees only by accident and at a distance.

Bruce's mother hangs over him, panic visibly with her, showing terror for the first time to the astonished helpers about her. And Phoebe, feeling as guilty as a murderess, sends up silent stumbling prayers from her sincere heathen heart that her tiny enemy shall get well, God, get well quick an' be as strong an' as beautiful as ever.

On a cloudy day in the month of March Mrs. Denham must go to the store at one o'clock to send away a mail-bag, receive another one and distribute the contents. Shep is moving about the house and yards easily now, but he can't go down the sloping ground to the store. Besides, Bruce is asleep. Phoebe promises to look in on him often, and to call her if he wakes. She would sit by him, but she fears that thus she might disturb his restful slumber.

Hal is on the front porch, Shep in his living-room with a book before an open fire. Phoebe goes across the back porch to the kitchen to be with the always cheerful Loretta, washing dishes. For a while she cautiously tiptoes back to the room every five minutes, stands for a second to look down at Bruce, and returns to the kitchen.

Once, hanging over the small white sleeper, studying his placid face, it suddenly comes to her that

she has seen just this face and just this expression a long time ago, when Shep was sick in Austin. Bending low, she kisses his brow; and rising steals out on the back porch and to the far end of it, away from the kitchen, leaning her head against a post, staring out across the dark wet fields, her hands pressed against her mouth.

Only a little time she stands there, though it seems long to her, and, remembering her promise, she hurries with agonized care back to the door, opens it, looks in. The tall Shep is kneeling by the bed, his hands held out but not touching his boy. She can see only the droop of his shoulders, the side of his face, his outstretched hands—his hands that speak. She backs away, slips up the stairs and hides herself for a long time in the attic.

The little clown is not waiting now.

· XX ·

Road with Many Turnings

On a fair Monday in May, soft, balmy, sweet with thousands of new flowers come to splendid full bloom in the Southern summer, Mrs. Denham raises at the breakfast table a subject put forward tentatively several times before during the past week. Hal is not there; he still eats alone, from a tray, by his own wish and by order of the undisputed mistress of the house.

Mrs. Denham asks who will go with her to town? She must make a dreaded and long deferred visit to the dentist, and then do some shopping. She will not leave Bruce for an entire day; she will need someone to drive and to look after him while she is in the chair and in the stores. She looks at Phoebe, and Phoebe looks at Shep.

"You go with her, Shep. You don't get out in the air enough anyway. The day will do you good. Besides, I've got something to do here that I've been puttin' off an' puttin' off for weeks. If I put it off again I can't look myself in the face."

Shep glances quickly at her unwavering blue eyes,

and there is for him nothing possible except gracious assent, spoken all the more graciously to make up for his past tardiness. He has fallen into the habit of looking upon himself as a useless hulk, he says; hence his unpardonable slowness; his Dessaix forbears speak in him when he is in this mood. There is a faint sneer on the pink-and-white face at the end of the table, and something also of triumph.

While Mrs. Denham dresses, Phoebe makes ready her victorious little enemy, holding him against her, her teeth biting her lip, when Ida is not looking. Shep, going about easily now with only a stick to assist him, harnesses the horses and drives the buggy to the front gate; and after a while Mrs. Denham stands by the buggy with Bruce in her arms, somehow softened by the unusual daintiness, nicety, smoothness of her toilette made this morning for the eyes of town; with the child, unfairly beautiful in the sorrowful eyes of the lost little clown.

Hal waves his hand at the three travelers; two of them ignoring him, the third waving curled fists and smiling radiantly. Phoebe waits by the buggy to see them off. She has already whispered her farewell into the ear of her beloved enemy. She looks up at Shep.

"Good-by! Take care of your leg to-day. You're not entirely well yet."

"Good-by, Phoebe! Any message for Aunt Lyd and Cousin Cesar? They'll ask about you."

"Message? Oh, yes; give them my love, Shepherd."

And she stands with her hand on the latch of the gate until the buggy moves down through the open woods-lot to the public road, until it turns there and disappears behind the trees, to be gone all day. Then she comes up the red-brick walk, her head down, her feet of lead; and climbing the steps goes on into the house, refusing to see Hal beckoning at her, and sits by a window of her bedroom for a few minutes.

Presently she lifts her shoulders, shakes her head, lifts her body up; and going swiftly down to the stable-yard harnesses a pair of horses and hitches them to a wagon with a green bed on it. She could have called in Pompey with the horn to do this, but she has wanted to do it herself. She often did it when she was on the road with Pappy Dibble, and he not feeling well; she can do it again. She *must* do it many times again, now; she might as well get used to it once more.

She drives the team out through the big gate, remembering the night she drove another into it from the storm; drives down to the road, then to

the porch of the store, stopping there; Hal applauding loudly as she passes the house. Unlocking the back door of the store, she throws open the front door, brings out one by one a new set of hickory bows, and sticks their ends into the staples on the wagon bed. Then she drags out a white canvas cover, drapes it over the hickory bows, ties the rope at the end of the wagon, leaving a puckered round hole in the canvas there.

Now she loads the wagon. Pappy Dibble's daughter knows how: a new frying-pan, a deep iron baking skillet having a curbing on its upper side to hold live coals in, a few tin dishes, a coffee-pot, an ax, a lantern, groceries, everything. She has already put in two days' feeding for the team down at the stable; more can be bought when needed, much of it would take up too much room.

She stands in front of a counter, tapping at her teeth, thinking if in her dazed hurry she has indeed forgotten anything here; and looking up sees Loretta coming toward her, coming with eyes such as Phoebe has never seen in the gallant, fearless, shameless, yellow woman—eyes of understanding, terror, admiration, love, pity that stabs.

"Miss Phoebe?"

"Yes, Loretta?"

"Whur you goin'?"

"I don't know, Loretta. Somewhere. Down the road."

"Will you be gone all day, Miss Phoebe?"

"Aye, Lordy, I reckon I'll be gone all the rest of my life, Loretta."

And then she slips into the arms opened wide for her, and lies against Loretta's great breast, grateful for it, letting herself go at last, yet crying to this suddenly discovered sister, "Hush, hush, you mustn't do that; oh, you *mustn't* take on so, Loretta; I'll be all right."

After a while, Loretta having promised tearfully to give a home to Little Breeches and having rushed back to the big house to begin cooking things to smuggle into the wagon, Phoebe closes up the store, drives the wagon to the front gate, and once more passes into the house. The fat grizzly-gray Hal shouts his applause, beating on the floor with his crutches, whistling like a boy wild with joy otherwise inexpressible.

This is not the old-time Phoebe in action here. That one would be flaming about the house, her shoulders swaggering, her head up as if she were smelling the wind, her heels striking hard on the smooth, wide floor-boards. This Phoebe to-day tiptoes about as if in the presence of pain commanding

respect, of something precious and dead; rapidly enough, but avoiding with anguished care all harsh noise; haltingly and uncertainly from time to time, feeling her body numb, her mind blurred, her eyes blind.

The bedding and Hal's suit-case are first and easy; he has said over and over again in the past week what he wants in it, including his puzzles, his cards, his fancy waistcoat, his gaudiest socks and cravats, his pistols, now to be restored to him. In preparation for this event he has recently commissioned the nimble-fingered Seneca to shear his thick hair frosted with gray, and his overgrowth of whiskers to within a half-inch of his face. That's the length Hal likes: thus he can at once escape both the dismal grind of shaving every day and the look of a long-bearded ancient. To the enthusiastic bad-egg man this is to be a blessed release, a glorious lark, a golden adventure; and he would bedeck himself for it.

In her own bedroom Phoebe finds her own packing more difficult. She has given no thought to what she shall carry with her; her mind has been too full to take in details like that. She stands in the middle of the floor, her hands pressed against the sides of her face, looking around helplessly, uncertain where to begin, unwilling to begin anywhere.

Loretta at the door, her eyes wide and showing unusual expanses of white, her face full of tender concern. "Miss Phoebe, can't *I* help you with something?" A wave of Phoebe's hand, and the understanding woman is gone, unhurt by the silent dismissal.

Into the clothes closet, and there is her yellow ball dress, the gilt slippers, now black with tarnish, and all the rest of that once dear outfit. Unhesitating as to these, which another has used for a purpose of her own, she gathers the things in her arms, steals across the hall, lays them on Ida's bed, comes back to the door, halting there a moment, her head against a side of it, her slim body drooping, her hands hanging dead.

Presently her head snaps back, she braces her shoulders, and once more is in her own bedroom, slowly filling a suit-case; slowly because she must reject so much that she loves. Brush and comb, toothbrush, stockings, underclothes, Pappy Dibble's old black note-book with his directions for making the simple remedies he once peddled along the country-side; this to be taken surely, for she and Hal plan to follow in his footsteps, at least for a while.

Here are her clown's make-up box, her painted bladder, a flat and wrinkled corpse of itself, her

peacock's feather, her pointed fool's cap, her hugely dotted clown suits; three of these, two patched considerably, as she has used them much since her circus days. She'd like to take all these things; for memory's sake only, not for use ever again to make people laugh. She *couldn't* do that, now. Yes, she'd like to take these things of a time that to-day seems a happy time gone, but she can't; and she lays them on Shep's bed. Maybe Ida will let him keep them, maybe he will keep them in spite of Ida; and coming across them sometime will remember her and her antics during their ecstatic first two weeks on the house-boat, and laugh. She'd want him to remember her in a happy moment.

Finally the suit-case is full. It can take no more, or very little more; and now she kneels by it, finding soft places between her folded clothes in which to lay her little children of the road. She holds them in her arms, looking down at them, talking to them in the language that was Pappy Dibble's and hers.

"Aye, Lordy, I 'lowed your days of knockin' about in a wagin were over, Arthur, you an' Gwendolyn an' Marguerite. Yes, an' I 'lowed mine were too. But we come off the road, children, an' we'll go out on hit again, an' follow it along through all its turnin's, an' this time we'll stick together till —till hell freezes over. There, now, I cussed again,

an' I promised your father a long time ago I wouldn't do that no more. Well, Arthur, we're an ornery lot, anyway, I reckin, all of us; but maybe we'll buck up yit an' see if we cain't do better in the future.

"Arthur, your father would be here to tell you an' your sisters good-by, but he simply had to be away to-day. He had the most important business in town that—that you ever heared of. He told me to say it for him, an' now you must say hit to him just as if he was a-standin' here by us, his eyes not laughin' at all, an' so full of gentleness, as they used to be. All you children tell him good-by now, for we must be on our way.

"Tell him, Arthur, you're sorry for the trouble you've caused him with your ridiculous young didoes, an' the noise you've made when he wanted to study, an' the terrible *expense* you've been to him, especially with your shoes. I never *saw* such children with shoes; it seems like you all, the last one of you, wear out a pair of brand-new shoes in a month, a-runnin' around like little wild savages, an' a-kickin' an' a-scuffin' your shoes against everything nigh you. Shame on you all!"

Phoebe's voice is stern and severe, but her eyes are not, and besides no outsider can hear her strictures upon their conduct and thus put upon them

that confusion worse than any mother's punishment could be. The door is closed and locked, and though the windows are open nothing comes through them but a shambling fat bumblebee, a yellow butterfly as light as a blown autumn leaf, the summer breeze bearing roses, Cape jasmines, honeysuckles, and something of the vast deep green woods.

Phoebe shakes her head sadly over the three held closely against her breast. "Yes, you're a pretty bad lot, *I* reckin. I don't know what in the *world* is goin' to become of you. Aye, Lordy, we'll jist have to aim to do the best we can, won't we, Arthur?

"Now you all tell your brother Bruce good-by. See, he's wavin' his little fists at you, his face all full of smiles. How come you all cain't be that way? You look as solemn as owls, an' as stiff as sticks, every last one of you. You're just ornery little ragamuffins come in off the road, an' your manners are *terrible.* They are that. Maybe it won't be long before Bruce will have other brothers an' sisters here, an' then—

"There, now, I hear your new father a-beatin' on the floor with his crutches, Arthur. You all must be good to him. Make out like you don't see his loose old legs, an' you must never look hard at them, or say anything about them. He's a pore thing now, Arthur, but he's in hell and cain't git out hisself. He'd

go though by hisself if he had to; an' then in a month he'd be all to pieces an' in misery. So we'll take him out along with us. He can't *ever* be anything to you or me but a jolly old fat brother. He's not like—oh, God, I cain't stand it, I cain't for a fact!"

Loretta at the door knocking and calling: "Miss Phoebe, is you all right? Speak to me, honey. Is you all right? I'm skeered about you."

And presently Phoebe lifts her head. "All right, Loretta." No one could hear her in that voice, and swallowing hard she gets to her feet and gropes to the door. "I'm all right, Loretta. I'll be out in a minute."

"Won't you open the door jest a little, Miss Phoebe, so I can *see* you."

"Oh, I *can't,* Loretta; I'm dressin'. I'll be out in a minute, I swear I will."

And she hears the negro woman move slowly away. She must indeed change her shoes and dress and stockings. It is a fancy of Hooker Dibble's daughter to go away clad as when she came into the big gate that windy night in November long ago. Time is passing, and impatient old Hal is thumping the floor with his rubber-shod crutches again.

The drab pin-checked dress, sewed by hand in wagon-yards and by camp-fires along the road,

shapeless as a sack, faded by many washings, recently washed and too generously starched by Seneca's Airy, still fits as well as it ever did, rustling prodigiously as she moves about. The brass-toed brogans, as rough as the sides of Papa Dooin's old elephant, are stiff with age, but there was always ample room in them for her slim feet, and for her this day they are the shoes of destiny. She could wear no others.

Out on the front porch to reassure the excited prisoner awaiting deliverance, standing behind him, patting his shoulders, saying, "I'll be ready before twelve—they can't catch us anyway, Hal."

"They won't try, Phoebe. Ida will be glad we're gone; Shep will do what she says, for the sake of Bruce. And suppose they did catch us, what could they do? By gannies, my Little Elizabethan, I wish they would. Oh, I could talk, Phoebe, with us out on the road in a wagon, away from this house, and they there asking, 'What does this mean?' Promise me, Phoebe, promise me this one thing, that if ever we cross their trails you'll not stop my mouth, as you have been doing for months, but you'll let me talk and talk and *talk*. Now go on and do whatever you please. Take as much time as you like. I'm as fidgety and impatient as a kid about to go on a trip. I'll not bother you again though; take all the time you

want. Forgive me, Phoebe; I'm a confounded nuisance. Trot along, sissy; I'll be good."

Hal sees only one person out there in the front yard going about slowly, touching the roses, the jasmines, the red pomegranate flowers, bending low over purple violets, passing on around the yard and out of sight; only a slim little figure in a long drab dress almost to her shoe-tops. It is Hooker Dibble's daughter, walking with the hermit boy.

The moment the stable is behind her and the fields before her the weather is autumn, November. Frost has touched the persimmons, and they are dimly golden globes of granular sweetness all streaked with silver at their tops. There are still chinquapins, miniature chestnuts, peeping, black-eyed and provocative, from their prickly burrs; and delicious beyond words to young appetites whetted by walking and running in the open air. Autumn field larks and coveys of quail rise with thrilling, whirring suddenness from the grass, so that often Phoebe seizes Shep's arm in tiny feigned fright, smiling up at him a moment later to show she wasn't *very* scared after all.

Breathless and of few words, they fare on through the woods, their eyes wide open, holding hands and swinging them up and down when the way is broad enough for two abreast. The old man of the road,

hidden by their happiness, is forgotten from time to time, and they raise their voices and shout in sheer ecstasy, falling silent and shamefaced when they remember him again. They do not try to explain why their voices lift in wordless song, for they could not say why it is; nor why they drop to sudden silence, though they know why that is, for now in these high precious moments their thoughts run side by side and slow speech is unnecessary.

He shows her where otters slide down a gray clay bank into the bayou. He has never seen them, but he is certain of his theory. That slick smooth path proves it, doesn't it, Phoebe? "Oh, yes, Shep," she whispers, "I know you're right."

In a dusky cove a school of minnows flip their silver sides above the water. "An old trout is after them," he explains. "Make a noise an' skeer him away," she pleads.

They sit on a log and listen for what they can hear. That was a woodcock calling away over in the woods, he informs her, proud of his knowledge and eager to lay all before her; and that bird nearer is a yellowhammer, and that impudent little barking close by is a red fox-squirrel, which soon he points out to her in a cypress tree standing with its feet in the water. Child of the country road, she knows all this, but she pretends that to her it is

knowledge strangely fresh and entirely wonderful.

Late in the afternoon they lie on a hillside and watch great white continents, countless islands, and vast archipelagoes drifting across a sea not nearly so blue as her eyes—so *he* says—and buzzards circling and circling upward until they are thin black specks that soon, it seems, must fade invisible into the sky. The sun slides down behind the pines, the air chills, here and there single brown leaves wrench themselves loose from parent limbs and sail around and around easing themselves to the waiting earth.

This is his kingdom, and she is his queen. And late in the afternoon the king and queen rise and parade back toward home . . . And now Phoebe is back at the big house, some radiance and fragrance of her recent royalty still clinging to her.

Home! This *was* to be that to them; a place to come back to no matter what heights the conqueror of Julius Cæsar should achieve. She must see it all again, every room of it. The shapes and the colors have a strange new vividness to-day; she notices things she has never seen before, drifting on through the old house, a homesick little ghost.

And at last she comes to the attic, Shep's vast secret chamber, also hers by gracious gift of her comrade king. Here were the pallets of Gwendolyn, Marguerite, and Arthur; pallets because they were

unused to beds and restless therein, her children of the road. Here the rain beat its little drums on the shingled roof making such magic music for the hermit boy that he could see armies moving, hear the thunder of horses' feet and the battle-cries of armored men. In a corner she finds a pile of bark samples, each with a leaf of its tree pinned to it—oak and hickory, dogwood and pine, peach and pear and apple and plum, fifty of them surely there used to be, but here now only a few are left.

Sitting on the floor, she lays them in a ring around her, and clasping her hands in her lap she bends her head. Cathedral quietness is here, sunlight dimmed and somehow quickened by darkness, the world shut out; and the little lost clown, unused to churches and their words and ways but recalling an hour in a great peaceful old gray church in New Orleans, begins whispering. "Our Father . . ."

And now at last she rises, steps out of the ring, goes out of the door, closing it softly, and steadying herself from time to time by putting out her hand to the wall she steals down the stairs and out on the front porch. Down by the gate is a small gathering of negroes—Loretta, stolid Pompey fumbling at the buttons of his shirt, wry-necked little Seneca, his portly Airy, Shirley, and many other children of all sizes and shades of color, silent and waiting.

Hal, already lifted to the driver's seat by these wondering friends, leans out from behind the canvas beckoning to her, calling to her, his voice with no banter in it now.

"Everything's in the wagon, Phoebe: your suitcase and mine and all the rest of it. Are you ready?"

Down the high front steps, saying nothing, along the red-brick walk, out of the gate, through the group opening to let her pass, and finally up on the seat.

"Good-by, everybody!" Hal is speaking, his old gray steamer-cap pulled down over his reddish brown eyes, staring in front of him. This voice of his is new to those who hear him; so low, fearful and reverential is it at this moment.

"Good-by, Miss Phoebe! Good-by, Mr. Hal! Good-by, Miss Phoebe!"

So cries Loretta, and so then the others; and the handsome yellow woman throws her apron over her head and rocks herself back and forth, moaning.

Hal touches the whip to the horses. They walk slowly down the woods-lot to the road, turn away from Crebillon, go on westward. The harness jingles, the wagon creaks, the wheels make tiny grinding sounds in the sand. Around them the sun shining, country birds singing, the summer wind saying sad secret things in the tall pine trees; behind them the wailing of negroes, ahead of them the long road

with many turnings; and now back under the canvas cover, in the dimness there, Hooker Dibble's daughter crouches trembling in a corner, her hands pressed hard against her ears.

· XXI ·

A Word on the Wind

By the year 1926 Papa Dooin has grown old. White now are his walrus mustaches once as black as the wide-brimmed felt hat and the long Prince Albert coat that he wore in the ring when he cracked the whip at the slow, portly, broad-backed horses with the ravishing pink and blue ladies standing daintily upon them ready to jump through the perilous hoops held by self-conscious uniformed roustabouts and antic clowns. Old, yes, and at last very set in his ways, his itineraries as fixed as the calendar.

Knowing Papa Dooin and his last year's schedule you also know that in a certain week of a certain month he will this year be in Atlanta, Atchison, or Austin; in Austin in a certain week in June to catch fond parents and friends and former students come in from ranch and city, town and farm and bayou plantation for commencement at the university there.

It is Sunday with the circus to-day. The green cars with the gold lettering, now considerably in-

creased in number during these twenty-two years, have rolled into Austin early in the morning, and though Papa Dooin's piety is no less than it was the white tops have gone up and all is ready for a good start when the city's quiet Sabbath is over. The weather this time is very promising—the skies clear, the air cool, the ground dry; and a group of the circus people gathered this afternoon in the dressing tent forecast a fat Monday.

The enormous obese man lolling in a wheeled chair, over and through which he swells and billows, is lamenting, but not too seriously, his luck in Saturday's town. "A dear cautious old lady thought of something new there to cut down my business," he goes on, his reddish brown eyes twinkling, his voice loud and hearty. Hal can still talk without using slangy jargon, and, more wonderful yet, be thought none the less of by his circus comrades. To them what Hal does and the way he does it is right; no one could suspect him of putting on airs about anything.

Hal's sixty-one years have not weakened his voice or dimmed the light of humor in his eyes. He wears rimless spectacles, but they are merely to make things look larger. And for all his lamenting about Saturday's town he appears prosperous enough. His brown linen suit is spotless, his new Panama hat

prodigious, his necktie gorgeous, his white beard and hair obviously matters of frequent and regular attention, and certainly he is well fed.

"What did the dear old lady say, Hal?" asks a listener, grinning.

"Her escort, presumably her husband, was about to make up his mind to try his luck at the head of the handsome blackamoor and of course at the elegant walking canes, worth a dollar of any man's money, you know—when she grumbled, 'What a shame to waste good eggs spatterin' 'em against a piece of canvas!' Some other member of her sex audibly agreed with her, and being thus encouraged the first economist grew louder and more eloquent; and before I knew it she had put doubt into the whole crowd that I had laboriously ballyhooed about me. Her husband took his hand out of his pocket."

"What did *you* say, Hal?"

"I couldn't think of a thing at the moment, but I recovered presently. I began sweet and low, as the poet has it. 'Waste? Did I hear someone say waste? Ah, my dear madame, no egg has *ever* been wasted against that gallant spread of canvas. These eggs you see here in this great bowl will provide for men who need it, relaxation, entertainment, sport, making them harder workers, more generous providers, better husbands; and having done that

and having at the same time sharpened the sight of the handsome blackamoor and increased his muscular agility they flow on down upon Mother Earth, enriching the soil and fertilizing God's green grass. And anyway,' I bellowed, being compelled to bellow because I saw my prospects moving away, 'and anyway let no one within the sound of my voice mistake *these* for American eggs. I have *never* used one of our country's eggs for this purpose, as laudable as it is. No, every globe of hen-fruit you see here has been imported by me direct from China, where the natives eat the chickens but scoff at the eggs.' "

"Did it work, Hal?"

"Aye, Lordy, as Phoebe would say, it did *not.* All I achieved was a discussion, and I don't thrive on other people's talk. Finally I had sense enough to let the matter drop; then the debaters, quite a lot of them there were by this time, drifted toward the side-show, and I ballyhooed some more about me; but all during the afternoon and night I kept hearing that dear old lady's terrible word, waste. I had a bad day, God bless her!"

While the listeners are laughing, Hal with them, the side of the tent is lifted, and a small woman comes in and stands silent by his chair, her face and attitude not in harmony with this jolly crowd.

"What's the matter, Phoebe?" someone asks.

"Oh, nothing. I want to talk to Hal, that's all." She looks at them, and they melt away.

"I've got to go, Hal."

"Can't stick it out, eh? Won't you ever forget him, Phoebe?"

"I reckon not."

"Well, Phoebe, all I'm worried about is that you'll fret yourself sick again. I know what you'll do. You'll go prowling around up there on that old hill of your dreams, painting pictures of what might have been, torturing yourself with regrets. Every time we come to Austin you're knocked out for a week—a little sleep-walking ghost. What's the use, Phoebe? It's all over. Be a good sport; take your loss."

"I'm not a good sport, I reckon, Hal. Anyway I'm goin'. It's after four now; I'll be back by ten. It's daylight until almost then."

"Well, trot along, sissy. Be as easy as you can on yourself. Take a taxi, don't fool with that old belt-line car."

But "that old belt-line car" is part of the program for Phoebe, and she sits well forward watching it lift into sight stores and houses and trees dating back to Shepherd's time here; and finally the green campus and the buildings on it.

Phoebe's pilgrimages are always simple things.

Leaving the car at the foot of the western walk, she sits a while on the old anxious seat beneath the trees as if waiting for someone—who can never come.

At a distance you would think her a dainty first-year girl-child of the university, early at an appointment with some equally serious student of the arts and sciences. Her little white hat is cupped closely about her head, framing a face of too high color. Her white silk dress—with tiny blue lines running up and down it, to make her look taller, the tailor has said—stops at her knees when she stands, refusing to stop there when she sits, as now. White silk stockings for her thin legs, for her feet thin-soled, low-heeled, round-toed pumps.

Dainty first-year girl-child? Coming closer, you see that this is a friend of ours, quite middle-aged. Her cheeks are rouged, her lips reddened. At the corners of her wide blue eyes are permanent little puckerings, at the corners of her generous wide mouth the down-pulling weight of years; and in her face is a hint of hardness, too much wisdom, and to-day a piercing wistfulness. No, this is Phoebe, dressed in the mode of the moment, and perfectly at ease, at least about her clothes and gaudy make-up.

Now she walks slowly up the brown graveled walk to the old main building, strolls about through the corridors, climbs to that upper floor where once

upon a time the fascinating geological specimens were, comes out, and leaving the campus, pushes on through the college settlement, and out at last to the corner where the small brown cottage stood a long time ago. A sizable white mansion has its lot and several lots adjoining it that used to be vacant. Her home has been rolled down the hill to a less desirable location, the last habitation on the street, beyond the pavement.

Halting at the gate, she looks in. Quiet in there, the Italian Bellamontis, well-known to her for several years, probably gone visiting with their spirited noisy children; and opening the gate softly, she tiptoes to the narrow front porch built low upon the ground, pulls a rocking-chair behind a climbing rose vine to shield her from the sun, sits down, and, leaning her head back, closes her eyes. She is glad the Bellamontis are out visiting; she has forecast no such luck as this.

Quiet here, the Sabbath quiet over all the city; a stillness felt this soft summer day, soothing to the harried and hurried prisoner of performance and trains—soothing and yet well-nigh heart-breaking to the homesick little clown. Her hands lie in her lap, clinched.

Two tall men presently talking by the picket fence, not far away across the shallow yard. She

peers through the vine at them, and remains strained forward in her chair, her hands to her face—a spectacled man in blue serge with pale brown beard, and a pink-and-white youth in soft shirt, short coat, and prodigious baggy trousers of a faded blue, their cut and color the very latest collegiate whim.

"Well, here's your old house, Father. You see, it's almost been kicked down into the ravine. Mr. Beddoes has pointed it out to me more than once. I think he comes this way every day when he goes out for his afternoon constitutional. By the way, Father, he came near flunking me in history, and if he had I couldn't have graduated this year. *You* used to be a shark in history, didn't you, Father? Mr. Beddoes says that when he was here before you were the most promising young history man the department had found in years."

"Yes, I did rather take to history, Bruce."

"And now all you do is to work like a slave out on the plantation and at the mill, while Mother and the girls gad about in Crebillon, and I spend money down here like water. I don't believe you ever do anything now that you want to just for yourself. You're scared to death of Mother, for one thing. Oh, I can see it. I tell you, Father, if *I* ever marry I'll be the boss in my house or know the reason why. Oh, you may smile, but I will, so help me.

"There's a circus in town to-morrow; it's already come, I hear. Mother and the girls say they're not going; they wouldn't. Let's you and I take it in, Father; have the whole afternoon to ourselves. Come on, Father; what do you say?"

"No, Bruce, I can't go to the circus."

"There you are! I knew what you'd say. I bet you'd like it too. You never go anywhere, never read anything—anything but farm and lumber papers and agricultural bulletins. Mr. Beddoes says you were a great reader once. Couldn't you do a little reading of the things you really like at the town house at night? There's a lot of marvelous new stuff on the Middle Ages since you were here, Mr. Beddoes says."

"Oh, I read a little now and then, Bruce."

"Where?"

"Out at Abancourt, on my house-boat."

"The house-boat, my eye! It's been sunk a half-dozen times by the high water, hasn't it, and it's a wreck. Besides, it's pulled half-way up on that pine hill; it isn't a boat any more, and it leans so that it must make you dizzy to sit in it."

"Well, I like to go there now and then, anyway. It's in the middle of the only deep woods I have now, and I am undisturbed in it. All the tenants and mill-hands understand that when *I* am in it nobody else

must come there. And when I'm sitting in it, Bruce, I seem to be a student again."

"Oh, yes, *I* know; you seem to be with your first wife, too. Won't you tell me about her, Father? It isn't as if you were really my dad, you know; after all we're only steps to each other, and we can talk as man to man, can't we? When *will* you begin treating me as a man? Now, for God's sake, don't say I'm only a romantic youth, as Mother does. I'm twenty-one, you must remember.

"Oh, I know a thing or two about your first wife, anyway. She's a kind of legendary figure among the negroes on the plantation. Miss Phoebe, Miss Phoebe—you should hear old Loretta go on about her, but only of course when Mother isn't around. Aunt Lyd loved her, Cousin Cesar is still crazy about her, and I have a sneaking suspicion, from the way he talks about her, that Mr. Beddoes never loved anybody else in his life, or ever can."

"We all loved her, Bruce."

"Do you love her still, Father? Go on, tell me. I'll not breathe a word of all this to Mother, I swear I won't. Won't you treat me like a man for once, Father? Though I have seen her only through other eyes, I have felt her in the *way* they talked, and I love her myself. Go on, Father, tell me. This little house was your home once, Father, with her. How

can you stand here and deny her? Do you still love Phoebe, Father?"

"Yes, Bruce, I do. She was the most wonderful—"

And the two tall figures move away, up the quiet street, slowly. This pink-and-white youth just speaking was once, she remembers, her innocent enemy. She had kept the faith with him, and now he . . . Phoebe holds her head in her hands, her eyes closed, her little teeth biting into her lip, struggling to breathe.

On the front fence now a dull gray bird with a flash or two of white about him, among all feathered things with singing hearts the great actor, improviser, poet. He sharpens his bill on the top of a picket, there is a soft swelling of gray at his throat. He is beginning. It is early morning, and he is a whole company of birds twinkling tinily among the leaves, tentatively, not sure yet if the day be here. He is suddenly a buccaneer jay shouting with shrill joy while small birds tremble; a bold bad fellow reputed to visit hell every Friday carrying sand to his red prince. He leaps into the air, circles, comes back. He is a father calling at young fledglings with secret warning in his voice that men are about. He is a mother saying things infinitely sweet and gentle and comforting to them. He is a hawk in the sky, a

kitten mewing, a captive canary singing of mountains that once were his home. He is an oriole, a kingfisher, a brown thrush, a tinkling wren, a crested cardinal bird. He is a creature drunk with happiness, leaping from paling to paling, curveting in the air, swooping to the ground, coming back to the fence; a fountain burst and flooding the parched earth. And suddenly he is still, then gone.

Up at the big white house a radio is switched on, taking an evening church service somewhere. Out through the open window it swims down to the little white figure bowed in the chair, rising and falling on the wind of the dusk; a great organ deeply throbbing, voices singing, drifting near, drifting away, far-away, swimming back. Of the hymn she catches no word, or tries to. Except one; that keeps coming to her, staying with her, lifting her up and up and up.

And after a while the little lost clown comes down, goes out of the gate, across the still town, back to the circus; her shoulders swaggering, her slim feet dancing, her face as bright as the western sky where a bonfire floats, in her mind that word of the hymn shouting with the voice of a conquering army—"Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!"

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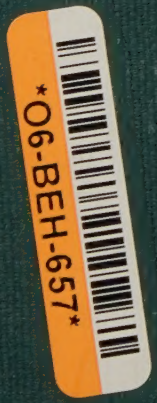
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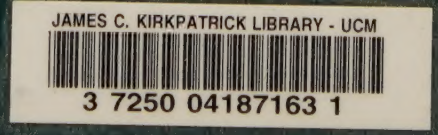
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